

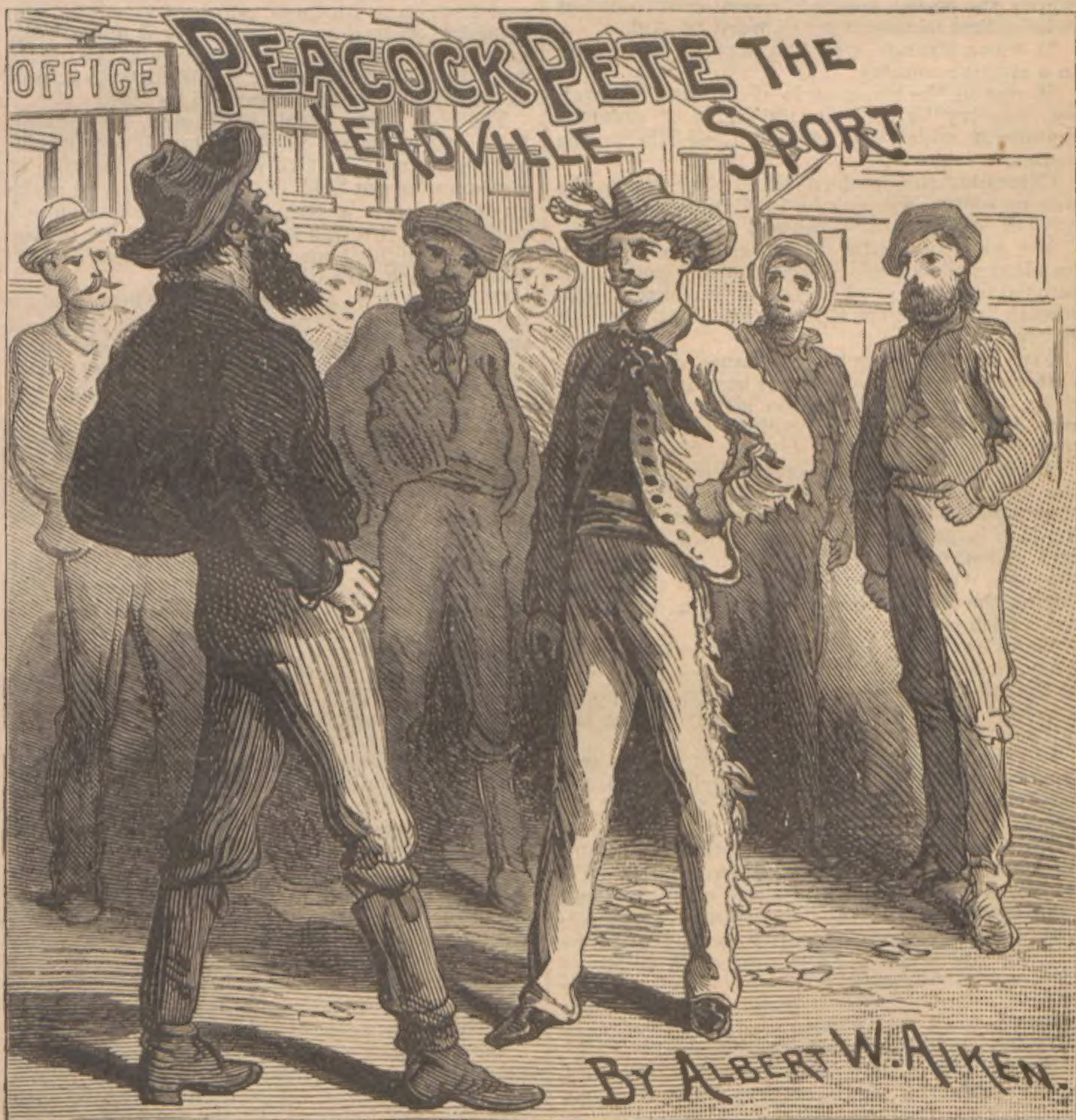
BEADLE'S POCKET Library

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"W'AT'S THAT?" CRIED GRIZZLY JAKE, FAIRLY GASPING IN AMAZEMENT AND RAGE.

Peacock Pete, THE LEADVILLE SPORT;

OR,

Hawk, the Boss Miner.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN CHIEF," "THE BLACK
BAND OF ROBIDEAU," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

REDMOND HAWK'S LAY-OUT.

"THE man that dances with you to-night dies, and I care not if he be my own brother!"

Full of passion was the voice of the man as he hissed out the words, and the beautiful girl to whom the speech was addressed could not but believe that he meant every word he said.

It was a strange speech, a strange scene and in a strange country.

It was in the bonanza land—in the "marvelous country" so rich in its stores of precious metals, of which the city of Leadville is the center.

Colorado, the modern Eldorado, where the mining scenes so common to California in the days of '49 are being repeated.

We write of a little mining-camp, not over a hundred souls all told, situated up in the mountains almost due west of Leadville, on the little stream known as the Roaring Fork of the Grand River.

Five Mile Crossing was the name of the camp.

It was a new place, had not been in existence over six months, but as the adjacent country was extremely rich in precious metals it was thriving wonderfully.

Already it boasted a good-sized inn, known as the Black Bear Hotel, from the circumstance that while the workmen were engaged in erecting it, a large black bear came down one night and endeavored to make a meal out of one of the men, who had sampled too much fire-water during the day and had foolishly lain down under a bush to sleep it off.

Bruin espied the sleeping man, and if some of his comrades had not chanced to pass that way at that particular moment, no doubt the mountain lord would have made a speedy end of the intruder upon his domain.

But as it happened, the bear's design was frustrated, and in the battle which ensued, the revolvers of the workmen made a finish of the brute.

The owner of the hotel, an enterprising middle-aged Irishman, who had graduated as a whisky-seller in the big Eastern cities, but had been forced to emigrate to the land of the setting sun on account of numerous difficulties he had got into, from his summary method of forcing his delinquent customers to settle their bills by punching their heads, and who was called Patrick McMulligan, had been in a quandary in regard to the name of the hotel.

He wanted a new and novel title, for like about all the rest of the settlers, he had an idea that in two or three years, Five Mile Crossing

would be the metropolis of the region, complete-distancing Leadville and all other would-be rivals.

The Black Bear Hotel had struck him as being a splendid name for his hostelry.

McMulligan was originally from Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, where such titles are commonly applied to houses of entertainment for man and beast.

The hotel, like all its class in the mining region, comprised also a restaurant and bar-room.

The town had started a little differently from the usual run of mining-camps, there being quite a number of the softer and fairer sex from the beginning, and so in order to make things pleasant, every Saturday night a hop was given in the dining-room, the apartment being cleared for that purpose.

McMulligan was a jolly, sociable sort of a fellow anyway, and liked to see fun going on, and then in a business point of view the hop brought custom to the house, for it made it the general rendezvous for everybody in the camp, and the outlying districts tributary to it, and of course the bar trade profited by this.

The hops were nicely conducted, for McMulligan was a man of powerful build, very quick-tempered and not at all particular what kind of a weapon he got hold of, when excited, to make an attack upon a foe; so it was really as much as any one's life was worth to attend one of the Saturday night hops at the Black Bear and attempt to kick up a disturbance.

Of course there are fools everywhere, and on the verge of civilization there are plenty of those pig-headed idiots who delight to kick up a disturbance in any place of public resort, particularly one where they imagine the lines are not strictly drawn.

For the first two months that McMulligan carried on his hops, he had had considerable trouble, for some of these fools had imagined that because the hops took place in a mining-camp on the frontier, they could do about as they pleased.

"Phat do yees take this for?" he was wont to exclaim. "Yer murthering blaggards! Do yees think that you're in a Leadville shindig or a Pueblo dance-house break-down? This is a respectable ball-room, and I'll be afther breaking the nose of the fu'st man that dares to misbehave himself!"

And he was as good as his word.

The Irishman was as strong as an ox, tolerably scientific, and being on his own ground, had little difficulty in preserving order; therefore, in a very short time, indeed, it became generally understood that the man who waltzed into the Black Bear Hotel on a "hop night" with the idea of proclaiming that he was a chief and capable of running the town, really took his life in his hands, for the citizens present were always ready to lend a helping hand in assisting McMulligan to preserve order.

So it was that the best people in the camp attended the hops, and bad characters were strictly forbidden entrance.

The man who uttered the words with which our chapter begins was a good-looking fellow of about thirty-five, tall, muscularly built, with dark eyes and hair and a short, brown beard.

He was dressed after the usual fashion common to the frontier, excepting that the flannel shirt which he wore was a rather elaborate affair, with a rolling collar under which a black silk neck-tie was passed.

He was called Redmond Hawk, and he was boss of the Gothic Mine, the leading concern in the valley.

Hawk was one of the prominent men of the town—one of the active citizens who are always up and doing.

Socially, too, he was considered to be a fine fellow, he being quite a ladies' man and about the best poker-player in the neighborhood.

The girl to whom he addressed the menacing words was a tall, queenly, brunette beauty, almost perfect both in face and figure, a modern Cleopatra, a second siren destined to fascinate about every man fortunate enough to cast eyes upon her.

She was a new-comer in the camp, having only resided there a couple of weeks.

Her name was Evangeline Hopkins.

Her father, Clinton Hopkins, or Clint Hopkins as he was generally termed, was a portly, middle-aged gentleman, with gray hair and a full gray beard, who had opened a general store in the camp about six months before, and had prospered exceedingly well.

He had a smooth, easy, plausible way with him that impressed the average miner greatly. The fellow who dropped in to buy a pint of whisky, a dollar's worth of powder, or any other small article was waited upon with as much politeness as though the storekeeper expected to corral a thousand dollars in the trade; and, without exactly saying so in words, yet he gave the customer to understand that he felt immensely honored because the other chose to trade with him.

"Old Soft-soap" was the irreverent nickname that some of the prejudiced men of the camp had bestowed upon Hopkins.

"He was too durned soft and sweet," they averred; but this is always the way with the world, the tongue of censure is never idle, and the more shining the mark the oftener comes the shaft.

From the first day of her arrival in the camp, when the superintendent of the Gothic mine had been introduced to the queenly Evangeline, he had acted like a man fascinated.

Hawk and Hopkins were quite intimate, and so it happened that the superintendent had been lucky enough to secure the first introduction to the lady, thereby rendering himself the envy of the town.

But from the beginning the girl seemed to take a dislike to Hawk, although the latter tried by all means in his power to make himself agreeable.

On the previous Saturday night, her first visit to the hop, Miss Hopkins had danced with Redmond three times, but on the evening of which we write she had positively declined to engage herself to him even for a single dance.

Hawk was not a patient man, and his blood was in a flame in an instant.

"Is it possible that you are engaged for all of the evening?" he had asked, both face and voice betraying the anger he felt.

"You have no right to ask such a question as that," the beauty had replied, in cold disdain.

"Possibly not," he said, striving with all his power to restrain his anger. "I do not assume that I have any such right, but I think it is only natural under the circumstances that I should ask the question. If you are engaged for the entire evening, then, of course, it is not possible that you can dance with me; but if you are not engaged—"

"I am not—I am not engaged for a single dance," she interrupted, haughtily; "but that has nothing to do with you."

"Excuse me, it has, as I will show you."

CHAPTER II.

HAWK EXPLAINS.

THE lady tapped her taper foot upon the floor in an uneasy, petulant way.

"I suppose you will think that I am very presuming?" Hawk continued.

"I do, most decidedly."

"And yet, if you will look at the matter carefully, I do not believe that you will think so; you cannot, if you have any sense of justice."

"Indeed!" and the lady's lip curled.

"You have declined to dance with me, yet I am not a stranger, but have been favored with the pleasure of your acquaintanceship. If your hand is engaged for the entire evening, that is an ample reason for the refusal, and as a gentleman I must bow to it, although I should deeply regret being so unfortunate. But if you are not engaged, then I consider that I should not be doing justice to myself if I did not ask, why should you refuse to dance with me? What is the reason? Have I offended you in any way? I am not conscious of it, and am ready to make amends in any possible way."

"In the school of politeness in which I was educated, a lady was not required to give her reasons for declining to accept the society of a gentleman," Miss Hopkins answered.

"It was a very poor school, then, and such an education is not at all fitted for this region," he retorted. "Here we live openly and speak frankly. The hollow shams of the East are swept away as mere cobwebs that obscure civilization."

"I see that you are determined to force me to explain myself whether I wish to or not!" Evangeline exclaimed, a little hectic spot of red beginning to burn in her cheeks and her dark eyes flashing.

"I think that an explanation is most certainly due," he replied. "You danced with me last Saturday night and as I have not given you any cause to become offended with me, it certainly seems very strange that you should decline to do me the honor to be my partner this evening."

"You must have a strange code of politeness in this region, if a lady can be forced to give her reasons for so simple a thing as declining an invitation to dance."

Evangeline was plainly annoyed—there could be no mistaking the fact—but Hawk was persistent.

"He, too, was angry, for he had taken a fancy to the girl upon first sight, and had made

up his mind to win her, and as he was by far the most eligible man in the camp—in his own opinion—he did not think there would be much difficulty in accomplishing his purpose.

"You must pardon me for holding a different opinion, but I think I am entitled to an explanation," he said.

"It will be unpleasant, possibly," she returned, coldly.

"I cannot help that, and I must ask you to explain why you will not dance with me to-night."

"I do not like you, sir, and I do not wish to dance with you," the girl replied firmly. She was no coward, and believed in the old adage that when danger is to be faced it is always the best policy to meet it boldly—to take the bull by the horns.

Hawk was terribly angered by the bold avowal.

"You do not like me?"

"No, sir."

"I do not understand what reason you can possibly have to dislike me," he observed, slowly.

"No reason at all, perhaps," she replied, in an indifferent way. "I do not think I could give any: no more, at all events, than that reason generally ascribed to women—'because.' I do not like you because I do not like you, and that is all there is to it; and as for dancing with you, I would far rather prefer to sit here quietly all the evening and take no part in the proceedings."

"You would prefer to do that?" he questioned, a sneer curling his lip, and a fearful light shining in his eyes.

"I would, most decidedly."

"Then you shall, if I can possibly arrange it in that way; for the man that dances with you to-night must fight with me."

The lady gazed at the speaker in angry indignation.

"You forget yourself, sir!" she exclaimed.

"You are not talking to a child! Such a threat is utterly ridiculous."

"Is it?" he retorted, scornfully. "Wait and you may have reason to change your opinion. You are not in the effeminate East now, where laws press so harshly upon an impulsive spirit, but out here in the wilds of the West where each man is, in a great measure, a law unto himself."

"In the East if two men quarrel, resort to weapons, and one falls by the hand of the other, the law calls it murder, and with either jail or gibbet punishes the victor."

"Here, in this section, untrammelled by the restraining devices of civilization, we deem it a fair fight, an easy way of settling personal differences, and we respect the victor, instead of attempting to punish him."

"Believe me, I am not boasting when I say I have had a fair share of such encounters since it has fallen to my lot to dwell in this marvelous country, and I have not been backward in taking up a quarrel when I saw that it could not honorably be avoided, and I have always had the luck to prove the victor."

"Therefore, understand that it is no idle vaunt when I say that the man who dances with you to-night does so at the risk of his life."

"And you will be doing great injustice to any one who asks you to dance if you do not warn him of the threat that I have made."

Then, with a polite bow, Hawk sauntered away.

Hopkins, at a distance, had noted the conversation, and had guessed from the expressions upon the faces of the speakers that it had not been an amicable one.

He hurried at once to his daughter.

"What's the matter, Eva?" he asked. "Have you and Mr. Hawk been having any trouble?"

"Yes, a little," responded the girl, whose face was in a flame.

"What on earth is the matter?" cried the old gentleman, impatiently, for Hawk was about the last man in the town whom he desired to offend.

The girl briefly explained.

"He asked me to dance with him, and I declined; he became angry, pressed me to give my reasons, and I told him frankly that I did not like him."

"Oh!" and old Hopkins groaned; "what in the name of all that is wonderful possessed you to do that?"

"It was the truth. He said he would not be satisfied until I explained my reasons, and so, of course, I spoke freely."

"But it was perfectly awful; and Hawk is a dangerous man to offend, too," and the old gentleman shook his head gravely. He was greatly annoyed at the unexpected and unfortunate affair.

"Of course I do not know much about the man; but, from what little I have ascertained, I was satisfied he was not an acquaintance to be desired."

"My dear child, you don't know what you are talking about," Hopkins exclaimed, much annoyed, and plainly betraying it. "You must not fall into the error of judging men in a wilderness like this by the same standard as in the East."

"A gentleman, father, it seems to me, must be a gentleman always, no matter where he may be found," the girl replied, evidently astonished that her father should be so affected about the matter.

"Hawk is a gentleman—a perfect gentleman; one of the best men in the town, too. Oh, I tell you, this notion of yours is absolutely absurd. I wish to Heaven that you had said something to me before you compromised yourself so fearfully; and you'll get me into a scrape, too."

"But I do not see how that can be!" Evangeline exclaimed, still more amazed. "Surely I am at liberty to decline any acquaintance I choose without bringing you into the matter?"

"Of course not. I am your father, and it is only natural that any one having cause of complaint against you should in a measure hold me responsible. You see, my dear child, you are just fresh from boarding-school, and no matter how complete your education may be, you are sadly lacking in worldly knowledge, or else you would never have made such a blunder as you have been guilty of to-night."

"Mr. Hawk, my dear, is a perfect gentleman, and there isn't a man in the camp whose good will I more earnestly desire."

"A perfect gentleman!" cried Evangeline amazed.

"Yes, my dear, that is what I said and it is quite true too."

"But, father, is he not a gambler and a man who has stained his hands in blood a dozen times at least?"

"Nonsense! he's superintendent of the largest mine for miles around, and although I presume he does play cards once in a while, it is only for pastime—just for amusement, you know, and as to his having any blood upon his hands, I presume that he has been mixed up in some affrays, but you must understand, as I said before, you cannot judge men and matters in such a country as this by the same rules that would apply in the East.

"This is a new country with new men and new customs, and must be gauged by new rules. There are no regular officers of the law in such a place as this, and if disputes arise between men here, they can not be settled as they would be settled in the East.

"If two men here quarrel and agree to go out and settle the matter with deadly weapons, if one is killed in the encounter we hold the other fellow blameless of all harm.

"Self-defense, you know—merely protected his own life, that is all. I presume it is some affairs of this kind to which you allude."

"I do not know, but I was told he was an inveterate gambler and that a dozen men had fallen beneath his unerring aim. He is no gentleman, father, but a bravo, for he has threatened to kill any man that dances with me to-night."

CHAPTER III.

WHY SHE REFUSED.

THE old gentleman gave utterance to a low whistle of astonishment.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, "you have got yourself into a nice scrape! Why, my dear child, I wouldn't have had this happen for a thousand dollars, but luckily it is not too late for me to repair the mischief. I will go to him immediately and explain that there has been a misunderstanding;—but by the way, who took the trouble to tell you about Mr. Hawk?"

"Nearly all the ladies who have visited me," the girl replied.

"The infernal old cats!" Hopkins muttered under his breath in indignation.

"Of course, as I was a stranger and wanted to learn all I could of the place which was to be my future home, I listened with interest to the gossip of the town, and I was amazed to find the opinion which prevailed in regard to Mr. Hawk."

"No, no, my dear Eva, you must not put it as strongly as that!" Hopkins hastened to observe. "You must not believe all you hear."

"A man like Redmond Hawk naturally has a great many enemies, and these foolish old women ought to have better sense than to repeat to a stranger such idle, foolish talk!" the old gentleman observed, testily. "But, as I was going to say, I can go to Mr. Hawk and explain that it is all a mistake; you can give him the first dance and as many others as you choose and everything will be all right."

The girl was amazed. She was not half as

well acquainted with her parent as a girl of her age ought to be, but having the misfortune to lose her mother at an early age, she had been reared by some of her father's relatives in the country and then when old enough had been sent to a boarding-school.

She had never known anything of her father's affairs except that he was a merchant in New York, doing business on a large scale, and was only favored by a visit from him three or four times a year, and on these occasions he only remained for a few hours.

When she left school, which was immediately after graduation, she had returned to her former home in the country, expecting to meet her father there, but she did not, and the welcome she received was cold in the extreme.

Then it was revealed to her that her father had failed in business and had been obliged to go to the West in order to commence a new life, and furthermore, she was informed that as her father had not made any provision for her support, it would be impossible for them to provide for her.

But the father had not deserted his daughter, as the worldly-minded relatives coarsely suggested.

On the very next day a letter arrived containing a check drawn to Evangeline's order, with instructions to join her father at once in his new home, which was given as St. Louis.

When she arrived at St. Louis, though, and went to the hotel to which she had been directed, instead of meeting her father as she expected, she found another letter which directed her to come to Denver.

At Denver another letter gave her instructions how to reach the mining-camp of Five Mile Crossing, where he stated he was permanently located.

All this seemed very odd to the girl, but in her ignorance of the world, she did not trouble her head much about the matter, although she wondered why she had not been directed to come to Five Mile Crossing in the first place, particularly when from the gossiping neighbors she learned that her father had been doing business there for some six months.

Upon mentioning the subject to him, though, he immediately assigned a plausible reason.

"I expected to be able to meet you in St. Louis," he said, "and then when I found that my business engagements would prevent me from so doing, I was sure I would be able to come to Denver, but, unfortunately, events made it impossible."

The explanation was perfectly reasonable to the girl, and she was satisfied, but if Hopkins had been a man who had fled from the East and was afraid that some one might trace him by following his daughter, he could not have devised a better plan of blinding the trail.

So the reader will see Evangeline's parent was almost the same as an utter stranger to her.

The amazement which took possession of the girl as she listened to her father's words, was wonderful.

"Oh, no, no. I could not think of such a thing for an instant!" she exclaimed. "Of course, I cannot with justice pretend to have

much knowledge of the world, yet, if I am guided by my womanly instinct, I do not think I will go far wrong. I cannot bear the sight of this man; instead of a gentleman, I think he is a ruffianly desperado, and I would not dance with him if I never danced another step in my life!"

Hopkins had no idea that his daughter possessed such a spirit, and being a weak, irresolute man, he naturally quailed before it.

"Well, I suppose you will have to go home, then, and this affair shut you out from all such innocent recreation as this while you stay in the camp," the old gentleman remarked, with a groan.

"Go home!" and there was an angry blaze in the great dark eyes of the girl.

"Yes, what else can you do? If you stay here you will be asked to dance, of course, and then I've no doubt that Hawk will be quite capable of keeping his word to the letter. He's a dead shot they say, and I know that there are not many men in the camp who would like to run the risk of exciting his anger."

"And do you suppose for a single instant that I will permit this ruffian to drive me from a public assemblage such as this?" Evangeline demanded, with the air of a tragedy queen.

"This is a strange country, I know, and since I have been obliged by circumstances to live here, I may as well be as strange as the people among whom I am forced to live."

"I will not go home! I will stay here, and if any gentleman asks me to dance, I will tell him of the threat that this ruffian has made," the girl replied, spiritedly.

"But don't you see you will only be getting some poor fellow into mischief?" the old man exclaimed, who did not at all like the way affairs were tending. "And it will be some stranger too, for I don't think that any of the men of the camp would be apt to risk angering Hawk, for he's a terrible fellow when he is roused to action."

"Is he a king then, this contemptible bully, that every one should fear him?" the maiden exclaimed in supreme contempt, her proud lips curling, and her dark eyes flashing.

"He's a sort of chief among the rest, there's no mistake about that," her father replied. "He's a regular fire-eater—just as lief fight as eat—and that is the reason why men who have any regard for their lives are a little careful about offending him. If I were you I would smooth the matter over or else go home."

"Father, I am not willing to do either. I am not disposed to bow the knee to this vile creature if all the rest of the camp is afraid of him."

"Ah, you're like your mother. When you once get your temper up, there's no use in wasting words upon you."

"When I am in the right I should be ashamed to play the coward's part," Evangeline replied with proud dignity.

"Well, well; I am afraid that it will cost us all dearly, but I will see McMulligan; perhaps he can arrange the matter in some way," and then Hopkins, terribly put out by his unfortunate accident, hurried away to find the landlord.

Briefly the storekeeper explained to McMulligan what had occurred.

"Bedad! it's an ugly affair," the landlord remarked.

"Yes, and I am afraid it will breed trouble."

"Sorra a bit of trouble."

"Don't you think Hawk will live up to his word?"

"Oh, he'll do that same. He's on the fight from the word go. No man iver axed him to step up to the captain's office and settle without finding Mr. Hawk to the fore ivery time."

"What is to be done?" asked the old man in dismay.

"Faix! I dunno. I tell yees phat it is, Hopkins, women are the divil for kicking up a bobby. Hadn't you better be after taking the gurl home and see if ye can't talk her out of this tantrum?"

"She declares she won't go," replied the perplexed father. "She thinks she has been terribly insulted, you know, by this threat of Hawk's, and looks upon going home in the light of a retreat."

"Shure! the gurl's head is level enough as far as that is concerned. That is exactly phat it is. Let her stick it out thin and face the music. She might as well do it now as any other time."

"Yes, but won't that raise a row? Hawk, you know, swears that he will kill any man that dances with her," Hopkins remarked with great agitation.

"There isn't the p'aste taste of a doubt that he'll thry to be as good as his worud, for he's a broth of a b'ye entirely whin he gets started," McMulligan replied. "But he knows me too well to raise any row here, besides that ain't the kind of a b'ye that he is at all, at all! He'll quietly invite the gintleman to walk outside and then he'll pop him over n'ate and aisy as you pl'ase."

"Oh, it's a most unfortunate affair," the old gentleman exclaimed, deeply affected.

"Yis; but it's wan of those things that a man can't help, you know. Afther your girl sees phat a foine fellow Mister Hawk is, mebbe she'd change her mind and dance wid him. Shure! phat more can any samale ax than a bold buck willing and able to murther ivery fellow that comes along for her sake? But there's the music and I must attind to the dancing."

McMulligan hurried away, and Hopkins returned to Evangeline in a decidedly unhappy state of mind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGER.

"I've spoken to the landlord, but he says he cannot interfere in the matter," the old gentleman said, in a helpless sort of way. "He evidently thinks that you are acting queerly, for he has a good opinion of Mr. Hawk."

"Oh, I've no doubt, for he and the man are probably friends."

"Don't you think you had better go home and take time to reflect upon the matter?" Hopkins asked, in a persuasive way. "Perhaps in time you will come to see cause to change the opinion that you now hold."

Evangeline shook her head decidedly. This

beauty had a will of her own, and she was not at all inclined to give way.

"Father, I reflected carefully upon the matter before taking the step I did," she replied. "And I am quite sure I shall not change the opinion I have formed."

"But if you stay here some one will be sure to ask you to dance, and then there will be trouble."

"Oh, no, that does not follow. I shall tell all who accost me how the matter stands. No gentleman is obliged to risk his life by dancing with me unless he chooses to do so. There isn't the least bit of compulsion about the matter."

"But surely you wouldn't allow any man to put his life in peril by dancing with you, knowing the threat that Hawk has made?" exclaimed the father in amazement.

"Why not, if the gentleman chooses to dare the peril after knowing all the particulars? Father, I cannot understand how you can look at the matter in the light that you do!" she cried, impulsively. "Why, from the way you speak one would think that this man was a very king and that everybody in the town stood in awe of him."

"My dear, he is a resolute, determined man and I assure you there are not many in the town who care to encounter him, for in all the personal encounters in which he has been engaged he has been wonderfully successful in getting the best of the struggle and therefore men who know him are careful to keep from angering him in any way."

"Oh, I understand!" and the proud lip of the girl curled in scorn. "Every word I heard about him was strictly true; he is a desperado, although he assumes to be a gentleman, and relies upon his murderous exploits to secure respect."

"My dear child, this is not the East, and you must not expect to find things here as they are there," the old gentleman replied in despair.

At this moment the first note of the music sounded through the apartment, and McMulligan opened the festivities by exclaiming:

"Now, gentlemen, select your partners for the first dance, if you please!"

The music was of the primitive order, consisting only of a single violin in the hands of an aged negro; but he was an extra good player of the simple melodies required, and no one had ever yet been so fastidious as to complain that they couldn't dance to Black Jake's music.

Three or four of the gentlemen present had had their eyes upon the stylish Eastern girl, who was by long odds the prettiest woman in the room; there was only about a dozen of the fair sex present.

The first one to reach her side was a tall, raw-boned youth, one John Michaels, a miner with a prosperous claim a short distance up the valley.

And as the girl looked at him, the conclusion was quickly reached in her mind that he was not the man to brave Redmond Hawk.

With his best bow he asked for the honor of the lady's hand for the next dance.

Evangeline politely begged to be excused; but as the youth persisted, she said:

"There is a reason why I should not dance with any one this evening. Mr. Hawk asked me to dance, and I refused. Angered by my refusal, he threatened that he would settle with the man that dared to dance with me to-night."

The under jaw of the youth dropped at once, and the girl saw that she was perfectly right in coming to the conclusion that he would not dare to brave Hawk.

"I guess there must be some mistake," he stammered. "I'll see Mister Hawk—he's a friend of mine and—"

"If you have to obtain Mr. Hawk's permission to dance with me, you may be sure I will not be willing to accept you as a partner under such conditions!" Evangeline cried, quickly.

The youth stammered out a few words, hardly knowing what he said, and then retreated.

Three followed him in rapid succession, and the same thing happened with every one.

All looked amazed, glanced at Hawk and then backed out.

By this time the nature of the situation had become bruited about the room and the girl found herself the center of all eyes.

Her position was an extremely painful one.

"The cowards!" she muttered under her breath; "is it possible that a single bravo can lord it in this manner over a whole town?"

Hardly had the words escaped her lips when a stranger made his appearance in the room who was so oddly dressed that he attracted general attention.

He was a good-looking, well-built fellow, with light, yellow hair that curled in little crispy ringlets all over his head; a slight mustache and a small imperial of the same hue decked his lip and chin. His features were regular and clearly cut; his eyes, a blue gray, were large and full, with a clear, honest expression—that sort of thing that wins friends immediately.

He was dressed in buckskin, but the upper garment was cut like a coat instead of the usual pattern of a hunting-shirt, and the lower articles were more like pantaloons than leggings.

Long riding-boots of untanned leather came up high on the legs, and a high crown soft hat, white as the driven snow, protected his head; and in the hat-band was stuck a cluster of peacock-feathers.

He was fully armed, and the weapons he wore were far superior to those usually carried by the men of the region.

The new-comer was evidently a stranger, and, after he had surveyed the scene for a moment, had inquired what was going on.

As it happened, the landlord, McMulligan, was the party to whom he put the question.

"It's a slight taste of a dance," responded the Irishman, after surveying the other with a critical glance, as if to make sure he was a proper person to be present; "if you would be after shaking a leg, pick out yer gurl and hop in!"

Now this was easier said than done, for the only lady in the room not engaged was Evangeline.

"But, Jove! she's a beauty!" the young man exclaimed, when he caught sight of her match-

less face, "and she's a cut, too, above the rest. Maybe she's a little proud, and don't care to join in one of these common shindigs. There must be some such reason or else such a girl would be snapped up right at the beginning. Anyhow, she can only say no, and it will not do any harm to ask."

So, without loss of time, he walked to where Evangeline sat, made her a polite bow, and asked that he might be favored with her hand for the next dance.

Every eye in the room was upon the couple, and Redmond Hawk, who stood apart with his arms folded, glowered with gloomy eyes as he looked upon the scene.

The young man rigged out so jauntily was a stranger. Would he dare to dance with the girl despite the threat that had been made?

This was the question that the angry man put to himself, and he could not help admitting that it was more than likely the stranger would brave the risk, for he looked like a resolute fellow, and one not easily scared.

"Let him, if he dares!" Hawk muttered! "First, the dance, and then a settlement with me, which will not be so pleasant."

The girl surveyed the applicant with searching eyes.

Here was a man who looked able to hold his own with any one whom he had ever seen.

His face, too, was a good one, and despite the roughness of his picturesque dress, which seemed to proclaim him to be as much hunter and trapper as miner, she felt sure he was a gentleman.

It was an awkward explanation for a girl to make to an utter stranger, and she was conscious, too, that every one in the room was gazing at them, eager to see what would be done.

But Evangeline was equal to the occasion, for her spirits rose to meet the emergency.

"I am not engaged, and I should be pleased to dance with you, sir," she said; "but there is a circumstance which you must know."

"Soon after I came here this evening, a gentleman asked me to dance with him, and I refused, because I did not like him. He became offended, and declared if I did not take him for a partner I should not have any one else."

Evangeline then paused, and the new-comer laughed outright, much to the wonder of the bystanders who were watching the progress of the interview.

None of them, of course, were near enough to hear what was said, and therefore could not understand why the stranger laughed.

"This fellow must be a regular meat-ax, just hungry for blood," he observed. "But, seriously, the man who would say such a thing as that to a lady is a scamp, and ought to be thrashed."

"His name is Redmond Hawk. He stands yonder, with his arms folded, and bears the reputation of being a desperate man."

"Desperate with his mouth, no doubt," the other remarked, with a slight sneer. "Well, my name is Peter Peacock, but, after the fashion of this country, folks generally call me Peacock Pete, and they say I'm the liveliest lad that ever came from Leadville; and if you'll take my arm, I'll be your partner, and settle with this gentleman afterward."

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVALS.

EVANGELINE rose and placed her hand upon the offered arm.

Somehow she did not feel that she was exposing this man to any danger by accepting him for a partner, despite the threat that Hawk had made.

He seemed so fully capable of taking care of himself that she felt sure he would prove more than a match for the desperado who had attempted to control her actions.

Perhaps if she had taken time to reflect upon the matter, she would have hesitated before she allowed the strange young man to enter upon this quarrel, but she was mortally offended; never before in all her life had any one presumed to dictate to her, and the idea that this Hawk, a man whom she utterly despised, now that she knew his true character, should attempt to force her to accept his company by depriving her of the society of all other gentlemen was perfectly monstrous.

It was only natural under the circumstances that when a champion appeared, ready and willing to do battle for her, she should accept him.

He knew the conditions and if he was willing to accept them she ought to be glad of the chance.

Hawk glanced savagely at the girl as she rose and took the arm of the young stranger and then, as they moved to take their place with the rest, as if unable to bear the sight, he turned abruptly and left the room.

Nearly every one in the apartment by this time understood what had transpired and was on the lookout for new developments.

Therefore when they saw the girl accept the stranger as a partner and watched Hawk retreat in anger they understood that there was likely to be bloody work, and they shook their heads, significantly. They guessed what would come after the dance.

Hawk was well known and his reputation as a fighter stood high, and not without reason, for in all the affrays in which he had been concerned he had in every case succeeded in getting the best of his antagonist.

The angry man had retreated to the saloon, and the whisper went around the room.

"He's gone to have a look at his we'pons and brace up with a cocktail for the fight, 'cos he sees that this hyer young cuss is well-heeled."

The supposition was correct.

Hawk was too keen a fellow not to take a careful survey of his man, and he had come to the conclusion, from the stranger's peculiar get-up, that he was a cowboy, who, tired of his prairie work, had concluded to try mining for a spell.

Now, from the nature of their business, the cowboys are "no slouches," to use the Western expression, in the use of weapons, and as a general rule the members of that class are bold and desperate fighters.

All this Hawk understood, and he did not at all underrate the man whom he proposed to "lock horns" with at the first convenient opportunity.

He hadn't the slightest doubt, though, that he would be able to lay the stranger out, for he was a much larger man in every way, and prided himself upon his skill in the use of all weapons; and then, too, he was rather inclined to look upon the young man as a conceited chap, who thought more of a fancy dress and of his personal appearance than anything else.

"I'll spoil his beauty for him!" Hawk muttered, grimly, to himself, as he sat down by the bar in such a position that through the open door he could see into the room where the dancing was taking place.

Hawk had decided upon his programme.

It was the custom when the dance was ended for the gentlemen to partake of liquid refreshments at the bar, light wines and lemonades being carried in to the ladies, who remained in the ball-room.

For the general *entree* into the saloon Hawk waited; he proposed to accost the young man and call him to an account the moment he made his appearance.

He did not intend to take any unfair advantage, for he believed in always keeping the right on his side, so as to stand well with the citizens, who were prompt to frown upon any underhand measures.

Hawk's position had not been unnoticed by the men in the dancing apartment, and it was easy for them to guess what was about to take place. They understood that Hawk was "lying low" for the young stranger.

There were some men in the room who did not bear Redmond Hawk any good will, and one of these took it upon himself to post the stranger as to what was likely to happen, when in the course of the dance he got a chance to exchange a few words with him without attracting notice.

"Say, do you see that galoot a-sitting in thar, 'long side of the bar, like a durned big spider?" said the miner, who was a young, elongated fellow with a hatchet-like face.

"Oh, yes, I see him," Pete answered; he was too wide awake not to have kept his eye upon the man who had made such a threat.

"He's jist old p'ison, that cuss is! His name's Redmond Hawk, and he kinder thinks he is a boss 'round this town. He don't like it 'cos that gal you air dancing with didn't dance with him, and he has sw'ared that he's going to make it warm for the man that takes her for a pardner to-night; so keep your eyes peeled for him; he'll be apt to do you a mischief if he kin."

Pete thanked the well-meaning miner for his caution, and said he would be on his guard.

When the dance was ended he conducted his partner to a seat, thanked her for the pleasure she had afforded him, and then followed the rest of the gentlemen into the bar-room.

It was the stranger's idea that if there was going to be trouble it might as well come first as last.

As Pete came into the saloon, Hawk rose and accosted him.

"See hyer, young man, I've got two or three words to say to you!" he exclaimed, gruffly.

"All right, spit 'em out; that's what I'm here for," Pete replied.

"My name is Redmond Hawk, and I'm an old

citizen of this town, while you, I believe, are a stranger hyer."

"That is my misfortune, and not my fault you know, and it is something that is soon got over."

"What I was going to say was that it isn't possible for you to know exactly how the land lies, but you've got yourself in trouble by dancing with that lady," Hawk continued. "Didn't she warn you that if you danced with her you would be called to account?"

"Oh, yes; but I never pay any attention to fool-talk of that kind," Pete answered in the most careless and indifferent way.

"You'll find this is no fool-talk, you young cock-sparrow!" Hawk hissed, his anger roused by the careless speech.

"You don't really mean to say that you are going to quarrel with me about such a little thing as that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why, what a bloodthirsty cuss you are! Thunder! you wouldn't strike a man without giving him a chance for his life?"

The speech seemed to indicate that the stranger was getting a little afraid, and Hawk was quick to improve the opportunity.

If the stranger was so weak in the backbone that he could be run out of town without a fight, so much the better.

"No, I'll give you fair warning to git up and dust, but after that time if I meet you in the town it will go hard with you."

"It won't be pleasant for the lady to be mixed up in a matter of this kind," Pete suggested.

"What do I care for her? She has insulted me, and must take the consequences!"

"Yes, but I say, can't we leave her out, and fight about something else?" Pete asked. "I will say something ugly to you, and you can slap my face, and that will be a good cause for a fight."

"I don't care how you fix it," Hawk responded, somewhat astonished by this novel proposal.

"Well, then, hyer goes; you're a tarnel, mean, pesky skunk!" cried the young man, in tones so loud that they could be heard all over the room.

Hawk was puzzled by this strange method of procedure, but as every eye in the room was fixed upon them, attracted by the sound of the altercation, he saw that the best thing to be done was to begin operations immediately, so he raised his hand and gave the other a sounding slap in the face.

But his antagonist was not to be caught napping in this primitive way.

Hardly had the hand of Hawk touched his cheek when out shot the right fist of Pete with terrible force, and the blow catching Hawk between the eyes, knocked him squarely off his pins, and he went over like a log.

By this time McMulligan was in the room.

"Ye can't fight hyer, gentlemen!" he cried. "Go out of dures and fight where ye like, but not on my premises!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUEL.

"Oh, I ain't particular where I fight," Pete remarked. "It's all the same to me, only that

according to all rules, having obtained a decided advantage, I ought not to be required to give it up.

"This man struck me first—you all saw that. He's a perfect stranger to me and I to him. There's no earthly reason why he should seek to quarrel with me, except out of pure ugliness.

"Now, pards, I'm not the kind of a man that goes round knocking chips off of any man's shoulder, but if I am assaulted I'm going to lay out the man that does it, if I can.

"I take it that this trick is mine! I've got my man foul, and is it the square thing to ask me to let up on him?"

This was putting the case pretty strongly, and the bystanders shook their heads; they didn't see exactly how they could interfere, but the Irishman, after the bull-headed fashion of his race, was determined to interfere and rescue Hawk, who was a particular friend of his, from the scrape into which he had thrust himself.

"See hyer, young man," McMulligan cried, "I'm the owner of this place, and, be the piper that played before Moses! I do be afther telling yees that I'll have no fighting in this saloon! Phat is it to me whether yees have the drop on the man or not?"

"That is a kind of a side-pard of yours, and you want to help him out, eh?" queried Pete, who immediately jumped to a correct conclusion.

"You're too fresh," responded the Irishman, angry to think his motives had been guessed so easily, "and if you're afther staying 'round these parts long you'll have to be salted, or else ye'll not keep, do ye mind?"

"Oh, I reckon I'll manage to worry along, and, anyway, I'm not asking advice from you on the subject."

"I'm the man that kin give it to ye."

"Not much you ain't!"

McMulligan had been indulging in this talk simply to enable Hawk to neutralize the advantage gained by the other.

But Peacock Pete was too lively a lad to be caught napping.

He still kept Hawk "covered," and did not give him a chance to draw a weapon. He did not have the least idea of letting the Irishman, with a little cheap talk, deprive him of the advantage which he had gained.

"Upon me soul, ye sha'n't fight hyer!" McMulligan declared. "Drop ye we'pon, or I'll be afther layin' ye head open wid this club!"

And seizing a club which he kept behind the bar in readiness for just such emergencies, he advanced toward Pete.

But our hero had expected some such movement as this from the beginning, and therefore he was fully prepared.

Hardly had McMulligan taken two steps when with his left hand Peacock Pete drew a cocked derringer from a side-pocket in his coat and leveled it at the breast of the landlord.

"Stop jest where you are, my friend, or else I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of plugging you in a manner that you will despise!" Pete exclaimed.

McMulligan's face was a picture as he found himself so suddenly halted, his purpose thus unexpectedly defeated.

"Take care what ye'r' about!" the landlord cried. "Be aisy wid that popgun!"

"Oh, I'll be aisy," Pete replied, mimicking the manner of the other, "or if I can't be 'aisy,' I'll be as aisy as I can."

McMulligan was no coward, yet he was not at all ready to die, and most certainly he was about as near to death now as a man could well come, for he felt sure from what he had seen of the young stranger that if he advanced Pete would not hesitate to drive a ball through him.

Some of the bystanders now felt called upon to say something.

"Say!" cried an old and weather-beaten miner, "McMulligan, this hyer ain't exactly the square thing. If this hyer man is a stranger, that ain't any reason for the hull town to want to climb him.

"I ain't no enemy to you, Hawk," he continued, "but seeing as how you commenced this little racket, I reckon that it's only the square thing for you to stand up and take your gruel like a man.

"Fair play is a jewel, and I reckon this hyer camp ain't a-going back on fair play nary time, if the court knows itself, and she thinks she does.

"This hyer gintleman has got the drop on you—got it by fair means, and as far as I kin see, all that you kin do is to gi'n in whipped, or give him a chance to wipe you out."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed three or four of the rest, not sorry to see Hawk getting the worst of the affair, for by his peculiar ways, he had made himself anything but a favorite with his fellow-townsmen. "That's the squar' thing an' no mistake."

"Own up whipped?" cried Hawk, white with rage; "not much. What do you take me for? Because this fellow took the first trick is no sign that the game is his! Blaze away! but if you don't disable me the first shot, I wouldn't give two pins for your life!"

"Oh, that ain't the kind of man I am," Peacock Pete replied. "If I had been going to go for you, I wouldn't have wasted all this time in talking.

"Although I've got the right to plug you according to all the rules of the game, yet I'm not going to do it.

"I can down you in a fair fight, and not half try, either, and as the boss of this bug-juice ranch don't like fighting inside of his doors, we can go outside.

"There's a good moon, plenty of light outside, and I'm willing to give you the fairest kind of a show.

"You can just march out of that door and down the street a hundred feet, then the moment I show my nose outside you can go for me as you please.

"Gentlemen, what do you say? Isn't this a square deal that I'm offering?"

The bystanders were unanimously of the opinion that it was the squarest kind of a game, and even McMulligan was obliged to admit that no fault could be found with the proposition.

The quarrel had put an end to the dancing, and all the ladies were peeping into the room with anxious faces.

The tide of sympathy ran strongly in favor of

the stranger, for Hawk was not any more popular with the ladies than with the men of the camp.

Then too the cause of the difficulty had been whispered around, for Hawk, upon being joked by some one who had noticed that the lady had preferred another partner, had bluntly declared that he was going to kill the "fresh young rooster" the moment the dance ended.

Therefore, when Hawk marched out into the moonlit street and took up a position some hundred feet off, his revolver cocked and ready for the fray, all the doors and windows of the hotel were filled with anxious faces.

With his cool, jaunty, devil-may-care air, Peacock Pete walked out into the middle of the street after his antagonist had selected his position.

Every eye was strained in breathless attention.

The duelists walked slowly toward each other, each, apparently, having determined upon reserving his fire until he could make a sure thing of it.

"By the way, I never thought to ask you, but is there any particular place where you would prefer to be bit?" asked Pete, evidently not able to restrain his propensity for chaffing.

For answer Hawk halted, raised his revolver and took deliberate aim at the speaker, but before he could fire, Pete's revolver spoke, and yet the Lively Lad had not apparently taken the trouble to aim.

It was one of those rapid, snap-shots, which only the most experienced marksman can render dangerous.

Despite his Spartan-like hardihood, a cry of pain escaped from Hawk's lips, and his revolver fell from his hand to the ground, the concussion causing a discharge; but the bullet whistled harmlessly up through the air, as if bent on a trip to the moon.

Peacock Pete had put a bullet through the fleshy under-part of Hawk's right hand, just grazing the butt of the revolver, and coming out at the wrist.

A trifling wound, not at all dangerous, and yet for the moment very painful, and utterly disabling the hand.

The duel was over, and Hawk departed, swearing vengeance, and Pete returned to the ball, the hero of the hour.

CHAPTER VII.

HAWK'S SCHEME.

THERE was a stormy scene that night between old Hopkins and his daughter when they reached their home.

"I do not see what possessed you to act so foolishly this evening," the old man exclaimed, testily. "Mr. Hawk is one of the best men in the camp, a man possessed of a great deal of influence, and there isn't one in the place whom I would not sooner offend than Hawk."

"And now all the fat is in the fire. That young ruffian has succeeded in disabling him, and as you were the cause of all the trouble, of course he will blame you."

"Father, I cannot understand why you should act so mean-spiritedly in this matter!" the girl exclaimed, in indignation, "Mr. Hawk has

no one to blame but himself, and if any one has played the ruffian most surely it is he. As for this young man the quarrel was forced upon him, and he ought not to be blamed because he defended himself when attacked."

"Oh, it's all very well to talk that way but you are looking at the affair in the wrong light entirely," Hopkins replied. "This fellow is a nobody—a nameless ruffian not worth two cents. The woods are full of just such fellows, while Mr. Hawk is a man of standing in the community; he amounts to something; his friendship is worth having."

"Father, I do not understand you at all when you speak in this way!" the girl exclaimed, impatiently. "I am satisfied from what I have seen to-night that every word I have heard in regard to the badness of Mr. Hawk's character is true, and why you should be willing I should be on friendly terms with such a man is a mystery that I cannot fathom."

"My dear child, you do not seem to understand my position at all," the father replied. "I am just getting along—just getting my head above water, but am still in that critical state when even a single blow would do much damage. Mr. Hawk has been very friendly—has helped me materially, and now you have repaid his kindness by treating him badly and through you he became embroiled in this quarrel."

"Oh, no, father! How can you say so?" Evangeline exclaimed, annoyed at the accusation. "Even admitting that I was in the wrong in declining to permit the acquaintance-ship to continue, there wasn't any necessity for all this trouble."

"I have always understood that it was a lady's privilege to terminate her acquaintance with a gentleman at her pleasure, and in this case when he pressed me for a reason, I gave it to him fully and frankly."

"Judging by what took place to-night, the stranger is amply able to take care of himself."

"Oh, you haven't any idea of what kind of a man Redmond Hawk is," Hopkins asserted. "He has a long purse and a long arm, and he will not rest content until he has had ample measure of revenge. If he, personally, is not a match for this stranger, it will be an easy matter for him to call upon his friends, and with their assistance he will be able to accomplish his object."

"But, Eva, my dear, I want you to patch up this breach with Mr. Hawk."

"Oh, father, it is impossible!"

"No, it's not; what utter foolishness to talk in that way!" Hopkins exclaimed, with more anger in his face and voice than the girl had ever before seen him display.

"You don't seem to understand. I want Mr. Hawk's aid, and I must have it. I cannot allow any little foolish girlish whims of yours to interfere with my business."

"Father, what you ask is impossible," the girl replied, greatly troubled, yet quite firm. "After what has occurred I cannot bring myself to ever again associate with this man on friendly terms."

Hopkins stared blankly at the wall for a few

minutes, and it was plain he was greatly perplexed by this decided announcement.

"Well, well," he said at last, after a long pause, "I guess you had better go to bed and sleep on the matter. Perhaps in the morning you may think differently.

"Oh, no, father; I have fully decided in regard to the matter, and I feel sure I shall not change."

A few more unimportant words passed between the two, and then they parted for the night.

It was a long time before the old man closed his eyes in slumber.

He had very little knowledge of his daughter, for since she was a child she had spent all her life, with the exception of a few holiday visits, at the boarding-school where she had been placed at her mother's death.

Hopkins's idea had been that she was only a child who could be easily molded to his will, and this stubbornness of hers astounded him.

Hopkins was not a man who believed in bold measures; his policy was always to gain the end he sought by indirect and devious means, and so when he found the girl so determined about the matter he forbore to press her.

She had expected from what he had said, that when the morning came he would renew the discussion; but Hopkins, having taken time to reflect upon the matter, had determined to adopt another policy.

All he said about the affair was a few words when breakfast was over and he arose to depart, in regard to the necessity of calling upon Hawk as soon as possible, in order to see how he was getting along.

"I judged, from what the people said last night, that he is not severely wounded," Evangeline remarked, perceiving that her father expected her to say something.

"The wound from a pistol-shot is one of those things which no one can tell much about. I have known a man to die from the infliction of much less severe injuries than Hawk has received," Hopkins replied, with a grave shake of the head.

It was his game to magnify the hurts that his friend had received.

"Although I do not like the man, I sincerely hope that he will speedily recover from his injuries," the girl replied.

Her father's words did not produce the impression upon her that he desired, for all the people the night before had made light of the injuries that the assailant had received.

After the morning trade was over, in the noon lull, Hopkins left the store in charge of the shock-headed boy who acted as his assistant, and went to the Gothic Mine to see how Hawk was getting along.

Hawk occupied a cabin on the mine premises, and was reclining upon his bunk when the storekeeper entered.

He looked gloomy and ferocious, and barely took the trouble to nod when Hopkins entered.

His hand was swathed in bandages, and he looked like a man who had been pretty badly used.

"Well, how do you find yourself this morning?" the storekeeper asked, helping himself to a chair, and assuming a sympathetic look.

"Deucedly badly!" Hawk replied.

"Dear me, how distressing!"

"Yes, I do not find it at all agreeable."

"I had an idea that the wound was not serious, and would not trouble you much."

"It is not as deep as a well nor as wide as a church door, as the fellow says in the play, but it is quite painful enough to give me all the trouble that I care to have at one time, and it is all the fault of that infernal daughter of yours, too!" Hawk exclaimed, savagely.

"Yes, yes, I know, and I am distressed beyond measure at the unfortunate occurrence. I talked with her about the matter last night and tried to make her understand how reprehensible her conduct had been."

"I reckon from what I have seen of her that you might about as well have talked to the wind for all the good it did," Hawk observed, with a searching glance at the old man.

"Well, I must admit that my words did not seem to produce much impression upon her," Hopkins admitted.

"Oh, she's a stubborn jade, I tell you!" Hawk exclaimed. "She is one of the kind whose will is like iron, it will not bend, and therefore harsh measures must be used. Her stubborn spirit must be broken."

"I don't hardly think, Hawk, that it is as bad as that," Hopkins replied, trying to smooth the matter over. "She is willful, I know, but then you must take into consideration the fact that she is only a child, just fresh from boarding-school, you know, with all sorts of foolish, romantic ideas in her head. It will take time, of course, to get her out of her silly notions, but I haven't the least doubt but what I can do it."

"Well, I have a great deal of doubt about it, unless you use harsh measures and make her understand right at the beginning that you don't intend to have any nonsense."

"Oh, I'll be firm with her, but I'll do it gently, you know; the hand of iron in the glove of silk. But, I say, who is this young sport? Have you found out anything about him?"

"Yes, my friends have not been idle if I am laid up for repairs," Hawk replied, significantly. "He's been a cowboy, but has tired of punching steers and so has come out here to try his hand at mining."

"He's a marvelous shot, as my wounds can testify, but I'll be even with him yet; I have commenced to pull the wires already. Mister Peacock Pete, of Leadville, will be interviewed some time to-day by a boss rustler, and if he don't take water, will be beaten to a jelly."

"Capital, capital!" cried Hopkins. And before he quitted the cabin he was in possession of all the details of the scheme.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRIZZLY JAKE.

NATURALLY all the particulars of the encounter between Hawk and the young stranger had been the talk of the town and the easy victory that Peacock Pete had achieved excited universal wonder.

Hawk had already been so successful in his encounters that the camp had come to look upon him as an invincible fighter, and for this young chap with his dandy ways, to win such an easy victory was an eye-opener to all.

But the wise men of the camp who knew what kind of a man the vanquished foeman was, shook their heads gravely and to their immediate associates predicted that the end of the matter had not come.

As one old fellow remarked:

"This young cuss is amazing quick, and reg'lar chain lightning on the shoot, but thar's other ways to kill a cat 'sides putting a bullet through the animile, and you kin jest bet yer bottom dollar that Hawk, jest as soon as his hands git well, will find a way to salivate this cuss; he'll never be satisfied to let things rest as they air now. Thar's too much of the gamecock 'bout him for that."

This was the prevailing opinion of the camp and so much talk was created by the affair that the sporting sharps of the town got to betting about it.

It's an old saying that talk is cheap and it takes money to buy land and in this instance the way the betting ranged was a better indication of the sentiment of the town than anything else.

Hawk's friends were numerous and loud in their talk, declaring that as soon as the vanquished man recovered from his hurts he would make it lively for the conquering stranger.

But when the sporting men, who were guided by cool and close calculation, and did not allow friendship or sentiment to interfere with business, offered to bet two to one that Hank would not be able to get the best of the daring young stranger, the loud-spoken advocates of the Five Mile Crossin'ite, did not dare to accept the wager to any extent.

A few had faith enough in the powers of their man to put up their money in a limited amount, but the great majority preferred to talk rather than bet.

Now Peacock Pete, although abundantly able to take his own part, as he had amply proven to the camp, was by no means of a quarrelsome or vindictive nature, and when he was warned that he must be on his guard against Hawk's malice, he smiled at the idea.

"Oh, I guess that is all right," he replied. "He was anxious to see what kind of a man I was, so he took a crack at me, and now that he has found out, I don't believe he will be likely to trouble me again."

"But Hawk is an old citizen byer, you know, with lots of friends," said the miner who had been kind enough to go out of his way to advise the stranger. It was John Michaels.

He felt sure over the fact that Hawk's threat to shoot the man who dared to dance with Eva Hopkins had frightened him off, and being full of admiration for Peacock Pete, therefore had taken it upon himself to post him as to how the land lay.

"Lots of friends," the young miner repeated. "Good many of them are desperate fellows, too."

"Hungry for blood and slaughter, I suppose?" Pete remarked, not at all disconcerted by the intelligence.

"Oh, yes, a terrible gang. You see, Hawk runs the biggest mine in this neighborhood and he has an opportunity to throw a dollar or two in the way of these scamps once in a while, and

so a good many of them swear by him. And, between me and you and the bed post, I believe nine out of ten of the cusses would be willing to cut any man's throat for a ten-dollar bill."

"You think then that Hawk will try to get square with me by means of some of these fellows?" Pete remarked.

"I reckon that will be about the size of it, for I heered a good deal of talk round town this morning among a certain gang, and though they didn't say it right out, yet they as good as hinted you would be fixed afore long."

"Sometimes such talk don't amount to anything," Pete suggested. "It is very natural, of course, that Hawk and his friend should be sore over his defeat, and should let their tongues wag pretty freely in regard to it, but talk isn't action, you know."

"Yes, I know that; but I feel pretty sure that this gang mean business this time, so jest be sure and keep your eyes peeled."

"Oh, I'll be on the lookout! you can depend upon that," Peacock Pete replied. "I'm not the kind of a fellow to be caught napping. The man that takes me asleep will have to get up pretty early in the morning; but I thank you for the warning all the same."

"Don't mention it; I hated to see a stranger imposed upon," the young miner responded. "I know Hawk of old; he has trodden on my toes two or three times since I've been in the town; but I knew I wouldn't have any show against such a man as he is, so I've had to grin and bear it. The case is different with you now; you're able to hold your own against him, and I'll be hanged if I want to see you jumped upon without warning by any of his gang. So-long!"

And then John Michaels went on his way, satisfied that he had put a considerable spoke in Redmond Hawk's wheel.

"Now that he knows what to expect, I reckon he'll be able to flax any of Hawk's pards out of their boots, if too many of them don't pile onto him all to once," the miner remarked to himself as he went on about his business.

Pete had brought quite a little capital with him, and was looking for a good chance to invest in some paying mine, so had arranged to meet a party who had a claim to sell that morning at the Black Bear Hotel.

When he arrived at that point he found quite a number of people congregated in the shade of the hotel, engaged in discussing matters and things in general.

Pete soon engaged in the conversation, and three or four of the throng improved the opportunity to give him a gentle hint that he would be wise to keep his eyes open after what had transpired between himself and Hawk.

The leading spirit of the Gothic Mine did not have as many friends in the town as he imagined, for a great many of the quiet citizens, who did not wish to become involved in any quarrel, did not like the overbearing way in which Hawk indulged, yet refrained from openly expressing their displeasure.

But now that a champion had appeared, who seemed likely to dispute Hawk's pretensions, they were ready to range themselves on his side.

"Oh, well, gentlemen, I calculate to keep myself prepared for danger; that is the way I was

raised, and the man who takes me at a disadvantage will have to put on his thinking-cap and hustle about, right lively," Pete responded.

Just at this point the attention of the group was attracted to a man advancing up the street whose appearance was decidedly peculiar.

He was a big fellow, a regular giant, standing about six feet high, and muscular in proportion.

He was dressed in the usual fashion common to the far West, big boots into which his pantaloons were tucked, a dirty flannel shirt, and a huge, broad-brimmed, slouch hat.

Around his neck though, he wore a strange ornament, and this instantly attracted the attention of the crowd.

It was a necklace composed of the teeth and claws of the grizzly bear, such as is sometimes worn by a savage chieftain.

And in the case of the red-man it is a trophy of victory, and signifies that in single fight, the dusky warrior has vanquished the mountain lord and despoiled him of his weapons.

"Who is he?" asked one of the crowd.

"Some mighty hard case, I'll bet a hat!" exclaimed another.

And the majority of the gathering nodded assent to this.

In truth, the face of the man was anything but prepossessing, for his features were gross and brutal, and the short, wiry, black beard that covered his chin gave him a decidedly sinister expression.

"I reckon from the looks of the critter that he's the chap I heern tell on yesterday," one of the miners remarked. "He's a new man that was taken on at the Gothic Mine two or three days ago; a regular rustler, so I understand some of the boys up thar to say. One of the kind of desperate galoots w'ot is on a fight, bigger'n a wolf—has a man for breakfast, you know, two or three times a week."

"If he goes in on that game in this town, I reckon he'll have to start a private graveyard of his own," Peacock Pete remarked; "for he won't be able to find accommodations for his stiff in that little God's acre up the valley."

The bystanders looked at each other significantly, as the young man spoke.

From the particularly hostile and defiant manner in which the stranger was approaching, they got the idea that he was on the "war-path," and as he was connected with the Gothic Mine, at the head of which was Redmond Hawk, it was only natural to suppose the chances were about ten to one that Peacock Pete was the man of whom the big fellow was in search.

"Wal, pardners, how do you all find yourselves this morning?" the stranger inquired, as he halted opposite to the group, and surveyed them with an insolent leer.

"I reckon you fellers ain't ever had the pleasure of making my acquaintance, and so I'll have to introduce myself.

"My name iz Grizzly Jake, and I'm the great b'ar-eater from the Rockies!"

CHAPTER IX.

A LIVELY CONTEST.

"OH, I mean it, every word ov it, pardners!"

the big fellow continued. "I'm the old orig'nal b'ar-eater and no mistake.

"I reckon some of you critters must have heered ov me, if so be as how that I ain't been long in these hyer parts.

"I'm jest the toughest galoot that ever struck this town, and you kin bet all your wealth on it, too!"

"I'm as hard as a pine-knot, as spry as a cat, and as savage as a Rocky Mountain lion. And if you don't believe it, jest some of you critters waltz up to the animile'sden, pull his tail and ax if he's to hum!"

And then shoving his well-worn hat down over his eyes in a rakish manner, he placed his hands on his hips and surveyed the crowd in insolent defiance.

There was a moment's silence.

No one of the miners seemed anxious to take up the banter.

"Wal, it strikes me that I've kinder run inter a Quaker meeting hyer!" the new-comer exclaimed, his face and voice both fully expressing the disgust he felt.

"Say! ain't you got any men inter this durned ole hole of a town? Are you all children w'ot has got to run home and ax their mammies afore they kin dare to look a gen'leman in the face?"

"Thar's a reg'lar gang of you galoots hyer. Ain't thar a man in the crowd w'ot has got the least bit of fun into him, hey?"

"W'ot sort of a graveyard do you call this, anyhow? You cusses don't go for to flatter yourselves that this hyer is a camp, do ye?"

"If you do, you're the biggest set of Jacks that I've struck in a long time.

"I thought you had some fighting men in the town—some men with sand and plenty of it too.

"Who's this pesky galoot w'ot calls himself Peacock Pete? He's the man that I'm a-hunting!"

And the speaker fixed his sinister eyes full on the young stranger.

Peacock Pete was so different both in dress and personal appearance to the rest, that it was not a difficult matter for any one to recognize him after being furnished with a description.

The bystanders were not astonished at the declaration, for from the beginning they had felt sure that the desperado had been egged on by Hawk to attack the young man.

"Stranger, I reckon you are barking up the right tree," Pete remarked, returning the other's stare with interest. "If you are looking for Peacock Pete, you can bet all your wealth that I am the man."

"Man!" exclaimed the big ruffian, with a contemptuous snort, "you don't mean to call yourself a man, do you?"

"Well, I reckon I pass for one in a crowd."

"It would have to be a mighty big crowd, and a mighty poor one, too!" retorted the other.

"What do you know about it? Who set you up as a judge?" Pete demanded. "What do you know about men, anyway? You don't call yourself a man, do you? you great overgrown, lop-sided ape!"

"W'ot's that?" cried Grizzly Jake, fairly

gasping in amazement and rage at being thus rudely accosted. "Why, you whipper-snapper! do you dare fer to go and call a gen'leman like I am an ape?"

"So you are an ape, and the biggest one that I ever ran across," Peacock Pete answered. "You had just better keep your eyes peeled, and look out where you go, or else the first thing you know some showman will get hold of you, and then you will be toted 'round the country in a cage as the great American ape, captured in the wilds of Colorado, the only specimen ever taken alive, admittance twenty-five cents, visitors must not poke the animal with canes or umbrellas, and children are requested to refrain from giving him candy or gingerbread for fear of making him sick."

Despite the fear which the man had inspired with his savage and insolent ways, there was a general snicker by the crowd at this speech of Pete's.

But Jake became red with rage.

He shook his brawny fist defiantly at the young man.

"If it wasn't kinder cutting it too fat for a man like me to waste powder on sich a whipper-snapper as you are, smash me into bash for a Digger Injun if I wouldn't jest pound yer till I took all that sass out of you!"

"Oh, you would?" and Peacock Pete assumed an air of amazement.

"Yes, I would, bu'st me if I wouldn't!"

"Just because I said you were an ape?"

"That's it, exactly. I reckon arter I got through with you—if I should keer to take the trouble to tackle you—that you wouldn't be so durned free with your names."

"But you are an ape, you know. Of course it's no fault of yours—you can't help it, because you were born that way," Peacock Pete remarked in the most innocent manner possible.

"You cussed galoot! I'll smash you into pancakes!" the bully cried in a rage, and he made a rush at Pete.

Hawk, when he had bought the services of the ruffian—for Grizzly Jake had come to the camp for the express purpose of picking a quarrel with the young stranger, had been careful to warn him that Pete was a wonderful pistol-shot, and that it would not be wise to allow him a chance to use his revolvers.

So Jake had made up his mind to bring on a conflict with nature's weapons, and as he had grimly remarked to his employer:

"I'll hammer him so that he won't be worth anything to himself or anybody else for a month of Sundays!"

And it was with the intention of carrying out this threat that he rushed upon the youth.

Really the odds did seem to be most decidedly upon the side of the big fellow, for he looked to be nearly twice the size of his antagonist.

But in all encounters of this kind it is not the mere weight of bone and flesh that counts.

Grizzly Jake was a flabby, overgrown monster.

He was a man that weighed over two hundred.

He could easily have spared fifty pounds of fat and been decidedly the better for it, while Peacock Pete was in the best possible condition, not an ounce of useless flesh upon him.

He knew too how to use his fists, being expert both as a boxer and wrestler, while Jake was a clumsy, awkward animal who trusted simply to brute force.

The bully's idea was to bear his opponent down by the mere weight of his rush.

And when he galloped at Peacock Pete it did not really seem to the bystanders, who were watching the scene with eager eyes, as if the young man stood any chance, for they thought he most surely would be borne to the earth, so uneven appeared the contest.

But it was not the first time that Peacock Pete had faced a foe who looked to be big enough to eat him.

He did not attempt to stop the rush of his antagonist, bull-like in its character, but gave ground, and then, when Grizzly Jake, encouraged by the thought that his opponent did not dare to stand up to the rack, renewed his efforts to bear down his nimble adversary, Peacock Pete, with the ease and grace of a dancing-master, slipped under his antagonist's arm, and as the other turned in a clumsy attempt to follow him, he dealt Grizzly Jake a blow under the ear, so well delivered and with such stunning force that it brought the giant to a halt immediately.

It was an ugly lick, and Grizzly Jake was astounded. He would not have believed that it could be possible for such a slimly-built man as his opponent to deliver such a blow.

The bystanders were as fully amazed at the stroke as the man that had received it, for they all believed the contest to be a frightfully uneven one, thinking that in the end the giant would most surely succeed in getting the best of his lighter antagonist.

But the vicious blow dealt by Peacock Pete, coupled with the peculiar manner in which it had been delivered, as well as the decided effect it had produced upon Grizzly Jake, caused them to open their eyes.

"Gosh!" cried one of the miners in amazement to his neighbor, "did you see that air lick? Durn me if it didn't fetch the big feller up all a-standing, as a sailor would say."

"It was as pretty a lick as I ever see'd struck," the other remarked. "I tell you what it is, boss, I reckon that this big galoot has run foul of the wrong man. Right at the beginning I didn't think the little cuss had any chance at all, but I'm beginning to reckon that if had money to bet on this fight, I should be apt for to put it on the dandy chap."

"You bet!" responded his companion with decided emphasis.

Grizzly Jake had been enraged at Peacock Pete for daring to "save" him, but now that he had felt the weight of his knuckles, and found them decidedly harder than he had anticipated his wrath was unbounded.

"You durned jumping-jack!" he cried, facing Peacock Pete, and panting for breath, the result of his violent exertions, "why don't you stand up to the rack and take your fodder like a man?"

CHAPTER X.

THE CONFESSION.

"Oh, you want me to stand up to the rack, do you?" Peacock Pete asked, approaching his an-

tagonist slowly, his hand down at about the level of his waist.

"Yes, sir-ee, hoss-fly Bob! that's the kind of man I am," responded Grizzly Jake, still puffing from the effects of his severe exertions. "W'ot kind of fighting do you call it a-skiping and a-jumping 'round like a pea in a hot skillet?"

"The way for to fight is to stand up and take a hammering like a man!"

"But you're almost twice as big as I am, and that gives you a most decided advantage," Pete urged.

"In course it does; any fool knows that," the big fellow replied, "and that's the reason why you hain't got any business to fool 'round any sich man as I am. You ought to take a back-seat when you see a cuss 'bout my size come up the street."

"And if I don't choose to take a back seat? the other queried.

"Then you ain't got no call to growl if you git hammered into a jelly."

"You want me to stand up and face you?"

"Now you're shouting! That's the kind of horn that I'm blowin'!"

"Are you ready?"

Peacock Pete was quite near to the bully as he put the question, but just beyond arm's length, and with a great flourish Grizzly Jake raised his hands into position and cried:

"I'm the cuss that's always ready! Come fer me as soon as you are able!"

Hardly had the taunt left his lips when his antagonist did "come for him" in a way that he despised.

With the most wonderful quickness Peacock Pete advanced upon the other.

"Crack! crack!"

Never in all his life had Grizzly Jake received two such terrible blows and yet he had taken part in many a brisk fight, where hard knocks were freely given and received.

Backward staggered the ruffian, almost blinded and demoralized by the two tremendous blows.

For a moment, like a man dazed, he stood and panted, as if unable to comprehend what had happened.

The spectators watched the scene with breathless interest.

Never since Five Mile Crossing had had a local habitation and a name had the camp witnessed such a struggle.

And then, recovering a little from the effects of the blows, and with a determination to "do or die," realizing at last that when he had engaged to face Peacock Pete he had picked out a man fit to stand before any of the trained gladiators of the ring that had ever tossed their caps into the magic circle, with a hoarse growl of rage he rushed upon his foe.

Not a single inch of ground did Peacock Pete yield this time.

But as firmly as a rock he stood, and as Grizzly Jake rushed upon him he measured the distance with his eyes as coolly as though he was in a sparring school, engaged in a friendly bout with the gloves, and when his antagonist came within "distance," delivered a couple of blows, straight as a die, which most effectually put a stop to the other's advance and brought him to a standstill.

Wildly Grizzly Jake struck at his skillful opponent, but Peacock Pete parried the blows with the utmost ease, and then, as if determined to show the bully that he was his master at all points, he brushed the feeble guard of the other aside and closed in with him.

A grunt of satisfaction escaped from Grizzly Jake's lips as he grappled with his nimble foe.

"Now, then, I've got yer!" he growled, as he grabbed Peacock Pete with all his vast strength.

He made the mistake common to ignorant men, who think there is nothing but brute strength in the wrestler's art.

"Oh, you've got me, have you?" quoth Pete, as he grappled with the bully. "Well, I reckon it remains to be seen whether you have got me or I have got you!"

Exerting all his strength, Grizzly Jake endeavored to crush the life out of Pete; but the other was like an eel, and seemed to slip out of the giant's grip with the greatest possible ease.

A dozen times Grizzly Jake fancied he had secured a hold which the other could neither evade or break, but each time Pete easily escaped him.

Jake felt that his strength was failing. Big drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, and his breath came hard and fast.

This was the moment for which Peacock Pete had been waiting, for hitherto in the terrible wrestle he had not attempted to throw his opponent, but had remained strictly on the defensive; but now, perceiving that Grizzly Jake was completely winded, he changed his tactics, secured an "under-grip" upon his man, and in a twinkling the heels of the giant went up in the air, and he was pitched upon the flat of his broad back with a force that seemed to knock every bit of breath out of his body.

Never before had the bystanders witnessed such a sight.

The giant was as thoroughly a whipped man as ever the camp had seen.

One and all made up their minds that the young stranger was head and shoulders above any pilgrim that had ever struck the town.

Peacock Pete, considering the amount of work which he had done, showed little sign of the strain which he had undergone.

He folded his arms across his chest, and waited for his opponent to rise.

The giant was in no hurry to get up.

It was fully five minutes before he recovered from the effects of the violent shock which the fall had given him, and then he only rose to a sitting posture, and looked about him in a dubious manner, as if he didn't exactly know what had happened.

But when his eyes fell upon his antagonist, the clouds passed from his brain, and he rightly comprehended what had occurred.

A look of amazement crept over his dull face, and he carefully surveyed Pete from head to heel, as if asking himself by what magical means he had been defeated by a man apparently—so far as all outward seeming went—not able to stand up for five minutes against such a bruiser as he was.

"Time!" ejaculated one of the crowd, anxious for more "fun."

A look of utter disgust appeared upon the face of Grizzly Jake.

"I reckon if some of you galoots had been through wo't I have, you wouldn't be so durned eager to yell out time," he remarked, rising slowly to his feet as he spoke.

Peacock Pete unfolded his arms, and put himself into a position to assume offensive measures. But Grizzly Jake had got all he wanted, and made haste to proclaim the fact.

"Hol' on, wo't air ye 'bout?" he cried. "None of that. No more of it in mine, if you please. I ain't a hog! I've got enuff. I'm a whipped man and I know it, so you kin jest count me out."

"Oh, you are satisfied, then?" Peacock Pete asked.

"You kin jest bet all the wealth thet thar is in Colorado on that!" Grizzly Jake declared emphatically.

"Suppose I am not satisfied?" the conqueror queried.

"S'pose you ain't satisfied!" cried the big fellow, repeating the words in utter amazement.

"That is what I said."

"I reckoned so; but what in thunder do you mean?"

"Who began this affair?" Pete demanded.

"Wal, I reckon that it was a critter 'bout my size, who came slashing 'round, anxious for a fight," Grizzly Jake replied. "And I got it, too, stranger. I'll own right up to that. I got all I wanted, and a heap more, too; you can bet your chips on that, and you'll beat the game every time!"

"And I was the man you were looking for, too," Pete cried, sternly. "I was the man you wanted to pick a quarrel with, and now I want to know who set you on—who paid you to assault me."

"No one," replied the giant, in a sulky way.

"You are not telling the truth, but you must own up or take another hammering!" and Peacock Pete took a step forward, his manner threatening.

"Hol' on, I'll spit out the hull thing!" exclaimed Grizzly Jake, retreating in alarm. "Nobody hired me; I ain't a-doing that sort of work, but a party told me that you could flax me, and bet me a hundred doilers to five on it. I reckoned it would be an easy matter to lay you out, and so I went for the bet thar and then."

"The man that made the bet was Redmond Hawk, the superintendent of the Gothic Mine!" Peacock Pete cried.

"Now you're shouting! he's the man. So long! I'll see you later mebbe," and the giant retreated, anxious to get away.

The battle was over.

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER PLOT.

To say that Hawk was astounded when he learned of the result of Grizzly Jake's attempt to conquer the young stranger, would be to only mildly characterize the state of mind into which the knowledge threw him.

Grizzly Jake had gone straight from the saloon to the shanty of the superintendent.

And when, in answer to his knock, Hawk had

inquired who it was—for prudent men in the wild Western mining region do not open their doors until they have ascertained whether the applicant for admission be friend or foe—Jake had answered:

"It's me, boss—all thar is left of me."

"And who is me?" asked the superintendent.

"Your old side-pardner, Grizzly Jake; but for the love of goodness, let me in!"

By this time Hawk had recognized the voice, and satisfied himself in regard to the identity of his visitor, so throwing open the door, he bade him enter.

Hawk helped himself to a chair, and by the dim light of the solitary window that only partially illuminated the apartment, anxiously examined the person of his visitor.

Grizzly Jake did not present a pleasant picture to gaze upon.

But from his appearance the arch plotter gathered hope. He had evidently been engaged in a fierce encounter, and from the fact that Jake was not disabled, he came to the conclusion that he had probably finished his opponent.

"Aha! you look as if you had succeeded in finding Peacock Pete," Hawk observed.

"Oh, yes, I found him, you better believe I did," the giant remarked.

"You found him, you say?" cried the superintendent, anxious for the particulars.

"Oh, yes, I found him and he found me," and Jake grinned in what he intended to be a humorous way, but the injuries his face had received made the grimace a fiendish one.

"Did you have a hard time of it?"

"You bet!"

"I warned you that for a medium-sized man you would find him to be a tough customer."

"Medium-sized!" cried Grizzly Jake, as if much amazed. "Wo't in thunder do you call medium-sized? Arter he hit me a couple of cracks I would have taken my oath that he was the biggest man that ever walked on two legs!"

"Well, you look as if you had been somewhat damaged," Hawk observed, after a critical inspection of the other.

"Damaged! well, I should smile! See hyer! do you know I don't believe that I'll ever be a good-looking cussa'gin! Durned if I don't think that he has sp'ilt my beauty. I don't know how the blamed thing looks, but my nose feels as big as a meeting-house!"

"But he—Peacock Pete!" exclaimed the superintendent. "Is he dead?"

"Not much! I reckon if you were to tackle him, you'd be apt to reckon he was the liveliest dead man that you had ever struck," Grizzly Jake responded, with another one of his prodigious grins.

Hawk was disappointed.

"I was in hopes that you would be able to make an end of him."

"Yes, that's just the racket that I was trying to play."

"Well, I suppose you have laid him up, anyway?" the superintendent remarked, anxiously, for a suspicion had crept into his mind that the ruffian had not succeeded in his attempt.

"Not much I haven't!"

"You don't mean to say that he got the best of the fight?"

"Pard, you never spit out a truer word in your life," returned the bully, gravely.

"I wouldn't have believed that such a thing could be possible! Why, you look as if you possessed twice the fellow's weight and strength."

"That's jest w'ot I thought, but inside of five minutes arter I tackled him I came to the conclusion that he weighted 'bout a ton, and had an arm that could hit as powerful a lick as the hind leg of any mule that ever hawed, hawed! Oh, I tell yer, I opened my eyes until they struck out like two blamed sorcers!" responded Grizzly Jake, perfectly serious.

Hawk did not disguise the disgust which inspired him as he listened to this recital.

"In plain English, then, you went for wool and returned shorn."

"In plain English, I got the worst pounding that I ever had to take in my life, and you kin jest bet that I'll never forget it, either!"

Hawk sunk back in his chair, utterly disgusted.

"The idea that a man of your inches should not be able to hold your own with this dandy!" Hawk exclaimed at last.

"Wal, boss, it's a sure-enuff fact, and thar's no getting out of it," Grizzly Jake admitted. "And the cuss may look like a dandy, with his peacock-feathers, but I'm satisfied that he's as good a man as ever put up his hands. I tried him on two or three p'int's and he was right thar and more too every time."

"But thar's no need of my saying much 'bout that, you've been thar, and know how it is, yourself, I reckon," and Grizzly Jake cast a sly glance at the wounded hand of the other.

"See here, Grizzly, I must find some way to beat this fellow. It is no use mincing the matter; both of us can't live in this camp, the town ain't big enough to hold us!" cried Hawk in a voice full of passion.

The giant scratched his head reflectively.

"I tell you w'ot it is, boss," he observed, after quite a long pause, "self-praise I despise, but ef I couldn't best the galoot, durn me if I know any critter 'round these diggings who kin. W'ot's more, arter w'ot happened to me I reckon that you'll find it a hard matter to git any of the rest of the boys to try the rifle."

"The cuss knocked me out fair and squar', 'fore a hull crowd, too, and when the thing gits talked 'round town it will be apt to scare any of the big chiefs who think themselves some pumpkins on the war-path."

"Could not men be got from some other camp?" Hawk suggested. "Men who have never seen this Peacock Pete nor heard anything about him?"

"That's the idee!" cried Grizzly Jake full of enthusiasm at the happy thought.

"I think that can be worked."

"I know it can, sure as shooting!"

"Do you think you can put your hands on the men?"

"I should blush to murmur!" cried the giant facetiously.

"And I'll make the same terms with them that I did with you. I'll bet them a hundred to five that they can't lay out Peacock Pete!"

"A hundred to five with each of 'em?"

"Yes, at that rate! That ought to be an inducement to good men."

"You're right thar, it ought to be, particularly if they don't know the cuss," observed Grizzly Jake, thoughtfully. "But to a man like myself w'ot has been introduced to the galoot and felt the weight of his fist, I reckon that a thousand to fifty-five wouldn't be such a heap of a temptation."

"It's plain that Peacock Pete has taken all the steel out of you," Hawk remarked, with a sneer.

"I reckon you air 'bout right thar. I ain't so big a fool as I look. When I git hammered within an inch o' my life, my legs have been too well brought up fer to see my body sp'iled ferever."

"How soon can you get at these fellows?" asked Hawk, abruptly, taking no heed of the other's musings, but pressing right onward toward his revenge.

"Lemme see! two or three days, I reckon."

"Where are the men, and how many do you think you can scare up—how many will be needed for the job?"

"Wal, from the way I feel to-night, I should say that somewhar's 'bout fifty would be enough."

"Bah! you are talking like a lunatic!"

"Thunder and lightning! I ought not to talk that way, for if ever a man had sense hammered into him by the wholesale, then I'm the critter! I'm only talking 'bout the thing from the way I feel, you know. Why, I'm as sore as a b'ile, all over me."

"Two or three men ought to be enough," observed Hawk, reflectively.

"Three men will be better than two; don't go to weakening the outfit, or he'll be sart'in to clean out the hull business."

"But are they good men?"

"No better ones in Colorado."

"How soon can you get at them?"

"Wal, say three days at the outside."

"All right; go to work and hunt them up immediately; here's fifty for your trouble."

And Hawk placed the money in the eager palm of the bruiser.

"Much obleeged! and now I'll be traveling!"

Grizzly Jake arose with considerable difficulty, for his hurts made him sore.

"Be as quick as you can!"

"You bet; so-long!"

The giant departed, leaving Hawk to his own reflections, which were anything but pleasant.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE PRETTY MEN.

THE plotter felt decidedly better after the departure of his visitor. At last there seemed to be a chance for him to get even with the man who had defeated him so easily.

"The scoundrel will do his best to hunt up the proper men," he murmured, communing with himself, "for not only has he the motive of revenge to urge him forward; but he knows that I will pay liberally for the service."

"That fifty dollars was a clincher. That convinced him that I meant business from the word go."

"What are a few dollars in a case like this when I am hungering for revenge?"

"The Jack-a-dandy, despite his looks, is the best man that ever struck this town; I am satisfied in regard to that.

"He got away with me easily enough, and though I thought Grizzly Jake would be able to best him, for he is reputed to be a terrible fighter, it is evident that he received more severe treatment than I. He is right about the three men. It will take three men at least to cope with this rascal; and if three men are not enough, I will get six.

"One thing is sure; from this time forth it is war to the death."

Hawk had wrought himself up to a perfect fury about the matter.

By day and night he thought and dreamed only of one thing, revenge upon the man whom he had provoked into a conflict, and who had triumphed over him so completely.

Then, too, the beautiful Evangeline was constantly in his thoughts.

From the moment that he had first beheld the girl, he had been impressed by her beauty, and had made up his mind that she was exactly the woman for him.

He had a certain hold upon the old man, her father, so he could surely count, not only that Hopkins would not oppose the match, but would push it forward in every way in his power.

True, the girl did not seem to be favorably disposed toward him, but Hawk did not think her likes or dislikes amounted to anything.

"There isn't a doubt she does prefer this impudent scoundrel to me; but I don't care two cents for that," he murmured.

"When I come to put the screws upon the old man, it will be mighty apt to make her change her tune.

"She will be glad to do almost anything then to keep the matter quiet, for an exposure would be a terrible blow to her pride.

"If she only knew what I know, I reckon she wouldn't hold her head quite so high, or put on so many frills as she does now.

"My course is all plain sailing after I run this fellow out of the town, and I will either do that or else put him where the dogs can't bite him."

In such gloomy meditations as these the wounded man passed his time, anxiously counting the hours as they passed slowly away, Old Father Time being seemingly shod with lead.

Three days came and vanished, yet the big fellow returned not with his hired bravos.

The plotter began to get impatient.

"Can it be possible that the scoundrel has gone back on me?" Hawk asked.

"Has he taken my fifty dollars and made himself scarce?"

"Curse me if it don't look like it!"

But he wronged Grizzly Jake, for on the evening of the fourth day, just after nightfall, the bully made his appearance, accompanied by three of the hardest-looking ruffians that the superintendent had ever set eyes upon.

"I'm a leetle ahind time," Jake remarked as he entered. "But it took longer than I expected to hunt the boys up, and I reckon the old

saying will fit right in hyer, 'it's better late than never!'"

"That's true," responded Hawk, "and I'm glad to see you. I looked for you all day yesterday, and when you didn't put in an appearance I began to think that something was wrong."

"That's nat'ral, of course, but I tell you, I'm the squarest kind of a cuss and when I say to a man that he kin depend on me, you'll find me right thar every time."

"Glad to hear it; but help yourselves to chairs, gentlemen."

Grizzly Jake proceeded to introduce his companions.

"Pard, I've picked you out the three best men that ever trod in shoe-leather in these hyer mountains," he began, and his companions grinned at the compliment.

"Yes, sir, you can't make no mistake 'bout these three galoots when you are looking round for three good men to tie to.

"This hyer lanky cuss is Gunnison Johnny, the best man that ever came out of that town."

And Gunnison Johnny, who was a tall, raw-boned fellow, with a swarthy, evil-looking face, rose and ducked his head in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"As good a man at either pistol or rifle as ever pulled a trigger. They say down whar he come from that he never went out yet that he didn't lay out the galoot that dared to stand up ag'in' him."

"That's a fine reputation," the superintendent observed.

"And he kin live up to it too, every time."

The man from Gunnison sat down and Jake motioned for number two to rise.

He was also a six-footer and muscular in proportion.

"This gen'leman is from ole Kentuck, the State whar they raise the best men on this hyer footstool."

"Kentucky is a fine State," Hawk observed.

"You kin bet high on that and you'll win every time!" the giant asserted.

"Wal, it took this gentleman so long to git from Kentucky out hyer that he lost his name on the way and so for short he calls himself Bill Kentuck."

"That is as good a name to take a drink with as I have ever heard," the superintendent observed.

"You bet! Wal, this gen'leman kin handle all sorts of weapons, don't matter what they are, from harpoons down to penknives, and he's just as good with one as he is with t'other, and when you take him with fists, he's a reg'lar bruiser and don't you forgit it!"

Bill Kentuck sat down and the third man got up.

He was a short, thick-set fellow, with a bull-like appearance, having a short, thick neck set upon a massive body, tremendous in its girth.

"Bowie-knife Sam," said Grizzly Jake in introduction.

"The best man that ever took an Arkansaw toothpick in his hand," continued Jake, "and the best wrestler that ever took an under-grip onto a man and heaved him off his pins.

"They do say that Sam hyer once run foul of an old he b'ar and bugged the critter to death, and that's the kind of a hair-pin he is!"

"Don't pile it on too thick, pard," observed the man of muscle as he resumed his seat, grinning from ear to ear.

"Why, I ain't said half enough 'bout you! Thunder in lightning! if I was to go on I could spit out enuff for to make a brick-house block."

"I suppose, gentlemen, that Jake has already explained to you how things are?"

The three looked at each other and then Bill Kentuck and Bowie-knife Sam nodded to Gunnison Johnny to go ahead and act as spokesman.

"Yes, he sort of give us a look at the lay-out," observed the ruffian. "As we understand it, thar's a sharp come to town who is putting on a heap of frills and kinder allows that he kin run the place."

"He's a good man, mind, too, boys," interposed Grizzly Jake. "Don't you fool yourself 'bout that! He's no flunk, and so far he has got away with every man w'ot has dared tackle him. He's a rustler, and no mistake!"

"Jake is right about it," the superintendent coincided. "It will not do for you to start in with the idea that he's no good, because he is one of the best men that ever struck this country, and he isn't a big fellow either."

"To look at him no one would take him to be a fighter."

"Sure as you're born! I picked him up for a duffer myself, and got whaled like blazes," observed Grizzly Jake, with a wry face.

"The way to work the trick is for all three of you to jump on him at once, fu'st getting into a quarrel. It will not be a difficult matter, for he don't take any slack from anybody."

"We kin do it, easy as rolling off a log, if he don't take water when we go to chinning him," Gunnison Johnny remarked.

"Well, you'll find him at about this time at the Black Bear Saloon, and as there's no time like the present, go for him at once."

The ruffians assented, then departed on their mission.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE TO ONE.

"SAY, you fellows want to be keerful," Grizzly Jake remarked to his companions as they walked toward the hotel.

"Keerful 'bout w'ot?" asked the Gunnison man.

"Wal, this is the squarest kind of a camp, you know, and if the three ov you go for to jump on the man at once, the fellows standing by will be mighty apt to take a hand in the game, and if you succeed in wiping Peacock Pete out, the town will probably provide a hempen necktie for every mother's son of you, free gratis, for nothing!"

The bullies did not receive this information with a good grace.

"Durned particular camp, this is, I reckon," growled Gunnison Johnny, "if they are going to kick up a fuss 'bout a leetle thing of that kind."

"Cuss me if I would live in sich a place!" Bill Kentuck asserted.

"Mighty low-down town now, and you kin bet on it!" cried Bowie-knife Sam.

"Wal, it's a sure enuff fact, pards, and I'm giving it to you as straight as a string. That's the lay-out that you've got to play at."

"I reckon it would take some good men to run that job through!" the Gunnison sharp exclaimed defiantly.

"They've got 'em, pard, they've got a heap of them in this town, and thar ain't a mite of use of your getting the idee into your head that you kin run this burg, 'cos it can't be did."

"Thar was five good men came in one night and calculated to make the camp howl, but the boys went for 'em, jist like so many bees when a stranger comes fooling around the hive, and the result was the hull band got laid out inside of five minutes. It was a pooty fight while it lasted, but it didn't last long."

"How kin we work the riddle then?" asked Bill Kentuck. "I'm durned anxious to finger the hundred dollars, 'cos I'm flat-broke, but I ain't willing to fight a hull camp for it, particularly if it's a camp of good men like you say this hyer one is."

"I reckon this is 'bout the size of it," Bowie-knife Sam remarked.

With all their bravado, the task of attempting to brow-beat the entire camp was not one that they cared to undertake.

"Wal, pards, I have been a-cogitating 'bout the matter, and I think the trick kin be worked in this way," Grizzly Jake remarked, after reflecting for a moment.

"Go into the saloon separately, jest as if you didn't know each other. You'll know this Peacock Pete the moment you set eyes on him, 'cos he wears a leetle bunch of peacock feathers in his hat."

"Then one on you must raise a row with him. The best way to fix that thing will be for one of you to git up close to him, and stand with your back to the galoot, then turn round all of a sudden and bump ag'in' him."

"That will give you a first-rate chance for to pick a fuss with him."

"You kin git mad as thunder, you know, and ax him w'ot he means by bumping ag'in' a gen'leman in that ornery way."

"He won't take a bit of chin, you bet, and he'll give it to you back as good as he knows how."

"Then rush in and grab him, and, pards, you want to put in the best kind of work at this pint, or if you don't, the cuss will have your heels in the air and your head on the floor, and you a-spinning round like a durned top afore you know it, for he's the heftiest man on a wrastle that I ever see'd."

The three immediately expressed their warm approval of this plan, for it seemed to them so extremely simple that it could not possibly fail.

One by one, they sauntered into the Black Bear's saloon, where a goodly company had already assembled.

The saloon was the common lounging-place for all the men in the camp when the toils of the day were over, for there all the current news was to be had.

The stories of the rich strikes in the neighborhood—the sad record of discouraging failures—

the new arrivals, and the departures from the camp, were all retailed at length.

In fact, a man couldn't keep well-posted in what was going on if he didn't drop into the saloon once in a while of an evening.

"The boss place for swapping lies!" an irreverent joker had declared.

Peacock Pete was leaning against one end of the bar, the end nearest to the door, busily engaged in conversation with three anxious men who had "pooled their issues" with the idea of buying a share in the Eva Mine.

But Peacock Pete firmly and most decidedly declined to sell.

"What is the use, gentlemen?" he said. "We have got all the money we want to run the thing; we are not at all hampered for lack of funds, and as we are sure that it is a good thing, what's the use of letting anybody else in to share it with us?"

"It's a big strike, gentlemen, and the deeper we get into it the better it seems to be."

"We would be a set of fools to sell an interest, unless we were compelled so to do; but if you wanted to buy the whole thing, out and out, now, why, then there might be some use in talking."

The three jumped at the idea.

"Mebbe we might arrange it in that way," remarked one, thoughtfully.

"To be shure! why not?" cried the second, who was no other than McMulligan, the keeper of the saloon.

The Irishman was a wily fellow, and when he saw that Peacock Pete promised to become a man of considerable importance in the town, he hastened to range himself under his banner.

In fact he had taken considerable pains to assure our hero that there wasn't a man in the town for whom he had a higher respect.

"We was afther having a little misunderstanding at our first meeting, do ye mind," he said, in the oily, insinuating way that he could assume when he so desired. "But ye see I was not afther knowing you thin."

"It will take big money to buy the Eva Mine," Peacock Pete declared.

"How much, my b'ye?" asked McMulligan.

"About a hundred thousand dollars."

A low whistle of astonishment came from the lips of all three.

"Oh, no more than that trifle? Begob! I thought you would be afther wanting a million for it! Oh, we'll take it, of course, but we'll take a dhrink furst."

And it was just at this point of the conversation that Bowie-knife Sam bumped against Peacock Pete.

"Say, young fellow, can't you see whar you go?" he cried.

Now Peacock Pete was one of those keen-eyed men, who saw everything without appearing to see anything.

He had noticed the three ruffians enter the saloon, and then after a short interval, saw Grizzly Jake come lounging in behind them, and from the expression upon the face of the ruffian, as he glanced carelessly around with a studied endeavor to appear indifferent, he guessed that the bully had entered the saloon for no good purpose.

Then, too, he fancied that he detected glances of intelligence passing between Grizzly Jake and the three strangers.

So, the moment that Bowie-knife Sam stumbled against him, he was satisfied that the man had done it on purpose, and suspected a plot.

"It was your own fault, partner," he replied.

"You're a liar!" cried the other, attempting to seize him, but Peacock Pete was on the alert, and springing back he dealt the man a terrible blow between the eyes that sent him reeling backward.

In their rage at seeing their pard thus roughly handled, the other two rushed upon the young man.

But his trusty revolvers were out in an instant, cocked and fired as if by magic.

Both men fell badly wounded, and Bowie-knife Sam, essaying to draw his pistol, was also served in the same way.

"Hold on, don't kill the cusses, they're friends of mine," cried Jake, comprehending that the battle was over almost before it had begun.

"And tools of Redmond Hawk, of course!" cried the victor with a sneer. "Well, let him send a few more along."

Again a cunning scheme had miscarried.

CHAPTER XIV.

NAMING THE MINE.

As was only natural, under the circumstances, on the next day the heroic conduct of Peacock Pete was the talk of the town, and one and all agreed that for real true courage the newcomer could not be excelled, if equaled, all along the border.

For five or six days his gallant acts were the common subject of conversation in all public places, and then, as nothing new occurred to keep his name before the public, the recital of his bold deeds was forced to give way to a newer sensation, a rich strike having been made by some lucky souls right on the outskirts of the town.

Peacock Pete was one of the first to invest in the new mines, after he became satisfied that the new discoveries were likely to prove profitable, for our hero was no greenhorn to be swindled out of his hard-earned money by a "salted mine."

It is a common thing in the mining regions for sharpers to bury rich bits of ore in worthless mines and then dig them up with a great flourish, and on the strength of the "discovery" sell the property at a handsome figure, then go elsewhere and repeat the operation in some other locality, and thus manage to make a good thing by "bleeding" unsuspecting greenhorns.

There were two others interested with Peacock Pete, John Michaels, whose acquaintance the reader has already made, and an honest, fore-handed Irishman, Dennis Murphy by name, universally acknowledged to be one of the squarest men in the camp.

It was the common opinion that Peacock Pete had had the luck to get in with two of the best men that could possibly be selected.

When the three met to arrange matters, almost the first question that came up was the name of the mine, and as Peacock Pete possessed

a half-interest, while his associates only boasted a quarter share each; it was agreed to allow him to name the claim.

"Well, gentlemen, it strikes me that the Eva Mine would be about as good a name as we could pick out," Peacock Pete observed, after revolving the matter in his mind for a few moments.

The Irishman burst into a loud laugh, and hit John Michaels a violent slap on the back, for with his native shrewdness Murphy had surmised that Peacock Pete had named the mine out of compliment to old Hopkins's daughter Evangeline, and it was no secret in the town that the young miner had been diligent in his attentions to the lady ever since she had arrived at Five Mile Crossing, although since the night when Redmond Hawk had thrown down the gauntlet of defiance to the whole town by declaring that he would kill the man bold enough to dance with the storekeeper's daughter against his will, Michaels's lack of inclination to take up the bully's dare was thought to have put him out of the race for the lady's affections.

"Aha, me laddybuck! there's a name that will be afther suiting you, I'll go bail!" the jolly Irishman cried.

Michaels got red in the face, for he was rather a modest, bashful young fellow, not lacking in courage, yet with not enough of the dare-devil about him to make him anxious to face such a man as Redmond Hawk.

"I think it is a good name," he said, in considerable confusion.

"It's an illegant name, and mebbe that spalpeen of a Hawk won't be mad as hops when he hears of it!" Murphy exclaimed.

"I don't suppose the lady will object," Michaels observed.

"Oh, no, I should say not. If she looks at it the right way, she will consider that it is a compliment," Peacock Pete replied.

"I s'pose Hawk will be kinder r'iled when he hears about it," Michaels remarked.

"Let him be mad, and be banged to him, the murtherin' blaggard!" Murphy cried. "Phat do we care for him? Not two wags of a goat's tail, do ye meind?"

"Oh, I reckon he will be inclined to cut up nasty when he hears about it," Peacock Pete observed. "But he don't own the whole of this camp yet, and if he has ever been of that way of thinking, the events of the last week or so ought to have convinced him that the supposition was not correct."

"I understand that he was out to-day," Michaels said.

"Oh, yes, I saw him meself, and he gave me wan of his ugly looks whin somebody spoke in his hearing of our partnership," Murphy remarked. "But to the devil I'd pitch the blaggard. Shure I wouldn't give a five-cent piece for either his friendship or his enmity."

"I reckon we'll have another tussle one of these days," Peacock Pete observed, reflectively, "and I tell you what it is, gentlemen, the next time I run foul of him I don't intend that there shall be any fooling in the matter."

Peacock Pete's manner was serious, and it was

plain to his companions that he had fully made up his mind on the subject.

"I am getting sick of being required to fight all the bullies that this scoundrel hires to attack me," Pete continued. "The fellow is a mean, miserable rascal anyway; no one but an utterly contemptible scoundrel would attempt to do business in that way."

"If there was anything of the man about him, he would be content to wait until his wounds healed and then go in to get square."

"Oho, he's not that kind of a gentleman at all, at all!" Murphy exclaimed. "You can take yer oath that it's a mighty long head Mister Redmond Hawk has on his shoulders."

"He has had a taste of your quality, and he's not anxious for a second trial, unless he can have iverything his own way, bad 'cess to him, the humble-backed thief of the woruld!"

And this was how the claim belonging to the three partners came to be called the Eva Mine, and the Irishman was right in his surmise when he said that Redmond Hawk would be enraged when the fact came to his knowledge.

"The infernal scoundrel has done it expressly to aggravate me!" Hawk exclaimed to his boon companions, "but I will be even with him one of these days. I will strike him a blow when he least expects it."

The listeners took in the words, but said naught.

In their own minds there was considerable doubt in regard to the successful carrying out of this scheme, for Peacock Pete had been so uniformly victorious in his battles that the impression had become general that he was invincible—his "medicine" was good, to use the jargon of red-men, and it must be a mighty chief, indeed, able to take his scalp.

There was another angry and disgusted man in the camp, too, when the fact became generally known that the three partners had named their claim the Eva Mine, and that was the father of the beautiful Evangeline, Clinton Hopkins.

It was the general impression that the old man was rather more inclined to favor Hawk than the new-comer, and so when the name of the mine became noised around town, a couple of the wags of the camp dropped into Hopkins's store to chaff the old man about it.

And they had their fun, too, for Hopkins, by his manner, showed that he was seriously annoyed, the moment the news was made known to him, although he strove to conceal it.

"It's a very good name, I should think," he answered, when one of the wags asked his opinion in regard to it. "I'm not much of a judge of such things, of course, and as far as I can see, it doesn't matter much what the mine is called, so long as it turns out pay-dirt in large quantities."

"I s'pose you'll kinder celebrate the thing, eh?" said the second joker, following his companion's lead.

"Celebrate!" exclaimed Hopkins, pretending to be astonished; "why should I celebrate? What interest do I take in the matter? It isn't anything to me."

"Oh, come, Hopkins, don't try for to play the innocent dodge!" cried the first joker; "you

can't pull the wool over our eyes, you know. We understand—we're fly—up to snuff, you bet! The mine is named arter your gal, and I say, I s'pose she'll be getting spliced to Pete 'fore long. You'll gi'n 'em a bang-up wedding, of course?"

"No, sir!" replied Hopkins, angrily. "it's no such thing. There'll be no wedding! It is utterly ridiculous. The man may be fool enough to name the mine after my daughter; that fact is neither improbable nor impossible, but it is a matter which neither one of us can control; but when you speak of the man as being a suitor for my daughter's hand, it is almost too absurd for me to take the trouble to deny it. It is no such thing, gentlemen, I deny it in toto!"

The jokers expressed their sorrow at having been misled by the false report, and then withdrew chuckling over the fact that they had succeeded in making the generally genial storekeeper lose his temper.

As a result of the interview Hopkins went at once to his daughter and told her all about it.

"Well, father, I should consider that the gentlemen have paid me a compliment if it is a valuable property, as I understand it is," the girl replied.

"But you don't seem to comprehend, child, this will enrage Hawk terribly. He is bitter enough now as matters are, but when he hears of this he will not leave any means untried to have revenge upon this young man."

"If Peacock Pete desires to meet with a speedy death he could not have gone to work in a better way."

"Hawk will spend his money now like water to get satisfaction."

"I should not be surprised if the rash young man met his death within a week."

"I do not think that is likely," the girl responded in a very quiet way, much to Hopkins's surprise.

Plainly she did not care for her champion as much as he had thought.

CHAPTER XV.

A BRAVE RESOLVE.

CLINTON HOPKINS, leading storekeeper of Five Mile Crossing, late of—no one knew where, for the old man was as dumb as an oyster in regard to his old abiding-places—rather prided himself upon his skill and cunning, but with all his shrewdness he was no match for the apparently simple girl whom he called daughter.

He had told her the story about the naming of the mine and Hawk's threats, thinking that if she did have any sneaking regard for Pete, fear for the safety of her lover would be apt to make her speak plainly and he would be able to get a correct idea of what she thought about the matter.

The girl, by her silence, however, completely baffled this design, and when the interview was over the storekeeper was as much in the dark as ever.

If she cared anything for the young stranger she was not disposed to allow any one to know it.

But Hopkins did not take this view of the matter.

He was more disposed to believe that the girl

was indifferent as to what befell or became of Peacock Pete.

"If she would only get over her dislike for Hawk," he murmured, as he returned to the store.

The old man had apparently urgent reasons why his daughter should favor the suit of the superintendent of the Gothic mine, yet it would have puzzled any one to guess them, for though Hawk was a prosperous man, yet this new venture that Peacock Pete had entered into seemed likely to make him a far wealthier man in the long run than his rival.

The girl, too, followed her father's example and uttered words to the empty air, as if invisible spirits were hovering near, willing to render aid and counsel.

"Heaven help me!" she cried with a despairing accent, "for I am utterly friendless. What a terrible thing it is that I cannot trust my father in this dire extremity and must depend upon myself alone."

"Why does he press the suit of this dark and dangerous ruffian with so much firmness?"

"Why should he care aught about the matter? Why does he think this man, above all others, to be a fit mate for me?"

It was a weighty question, and one over which she pondered for a long time.

But the more she thought about the matter, the greater became her perplexity, until at last she gave up the attempt to unravel the mystery in despair. Her father's words, though, had made her determined to take an active part in the matter.

She was satisfied from what her sire had said that Hawk had determined to attack Peacock Pete, and she guessed the mischief would be wrought by hired bravos, who would not give their victim any chance for his life.

"At all risks he must be warned!" she exclaimed, "and as I cannot trust any one to give the warning, for the person whom I might select would be far more apt to prove a foe than a friend, I must contrive in some way to see my gallant champion myself."

The darkness came on that night thick and muggy, for the storm-clouds were in the air, and a deluge of rain seemed probable.

It was an easy matter for the girl to wrap herself in her waterproof cloak, draw a dark veil over her face, and make her exit from the house by the back way.

She trusted to be able to speedily find the man she sought, so as to return to the house before her absence was noticed.

A very favorable time had she chosen for the execution of her scheme, for from seven to ten her father was always extremely busy in his store, for nine-tenths of the trade of the day was concentrated in those few hours, the miners not being able to leave their employment until the shades of night had descended upon the town.

Evangeline had set forth with a well-defined purpose.

She had penned a brief note, writing it on a half-page of foolscap, in a large, round, school-boy hand, and inclosed it in a common yellow envelope, so that it looked as unlike a lady's missive as possible.

It was her idea to find some boy to carry the note to Peacock Pete, for the irrepressible small boy made things lively in the little camp of Five Mile Crossing, as well as in the towns and villages within the confines of civilization.

The small boy was easily found.

He knew Peacock Pete, and the gift of a silver quarter induced him to gladly undertake the delivery of the note.

Pete was at the hotel, as Evangeline had expected, and the note was safely given into his hands.

And when he had perused the missive, he assumed a careless air, so that it would have been a sheer impossibility for any of the bystanders to suspect that there was any message of importance in the note, bade the boy follow him, and when he got into the street, made the heart of the urchin leap with delight by the present of another quarter, when he pointed out where the lady was standing in the shade of a building, a little removed from the main street, and the lights from the gayly-illuminated saloons cutting into the darkness.

"Run along, sonny, you're a good boy," said Peacock Pete, after the lad had informed him as to the whereabouts of the lady.

The boy obeyed the injunction, eager to display to his companions the prize that he had gained.

"I have something important to say to you, sir," Evangeline said, just a little nervous as Peacock Pete approached, "and so I took this method of meeting you, for I could not think of any better way."

"I am very much obliged to you, I am sure," responded the young man, doffing his hat as respectfully as though he was addressing a queen.

"I have only a few words to say, and I suppose we can talk here without danger of interruption," Evangeline remarked, with an inquiring glance around her.

"We had better walk along slowly," Peacock Pete replied, "for we would be apt to attract attention if we remain stationary here."

The girl perceived the wisdom of this advice, and so the two strolled slowly along.

"I felt it my duty to warn you that you have a powerful and unscrupulous foe who will not stop at anything calculated to injure you," she said, coming at once to the point, for she felt strangely embarrassed by the novelty of the situation.

"I can guess to whom you refer. This Redmond Hawk is the enemy who is so anxious to do me harm."

"Yes, he is a bold, bad man."

"There isn't the least doubt about that. It was my fortune to run foul of him when I first came into this camp, and I suppose the war will be kept up until one of us is either killed or driven from the town."

"The fellow is something of a coward, too, for all of his pretensions; he has been around town for a day or two now, amply well enough to renew the quarrel if he so desired, but he has not made a move, although I have been expecting it and have been on my guard, ready for war."

"Ah, but I do not think that he intends to at-

tack you openly?" Evangeline exclaimed, quickly. "He has learned better than that. He does not intend to trust to his own powers now, but will hire desperate, blood-stained men to fight his battles."

"Why, Miss Evangeline, that has been his game right from the beginning," Peacock Pete replied. "Ever since the night of our encounter, when I succeeded in whipping him so easily, he has scoured the country all around in search of champions to carry on his quarrel."

"But I think it is about time that that game should come to an end."

"I am not a professional fighter; I do not pose as a bully before the town."

"Of course when a quarrel is forced upon me I always try to do all I can to come out ahead."

"Oh, I feel sure that you do not desire trouble," the girl exclaimed, earnestly. "Sometimes, when I reflect upon the matter, I feel so sorry that I was the cause of this man's hatred toward you."

"Perhaps it would have been better on that dreadful night if I had left the dance and retired to my home, but then I was not used to this strange country, and the man angered me so that I forgot the dictates of prudence and determined that his menace should not drive me home."

"You acted exactly right!" Peacock Pete declared, warmly. "No one can blame you. It was your privilege to refuse to dance with the man if you did not like him, and he showed that he was nothing but a low-bred ruffian by acting as he did."

"But I have been the cause of your being involved in a quarrel with this man. If it had not been for that unfortunate affair you would not have been drawn into this difficulty," she said, earnestly.

"I'm not so sure about that," he answered. "It is more than probable that we would have had trouble about something else, for he is inclined to play the bully, and I am one of the kind who will not submit tamely to anything of that sort."

"I had a brief conversation with my father this evening and he told me that Hawk was determined to have your life, and that he intended to hire ruffians to attack you, and so I could not rest until I got an opportunity to warn you of the danger that threatened."

"Miss Evangeline, believe me it will be a long time before I shall forget this service!"

"Oh, do not speak of it; think of the danger that you so freely risked for my sake!"

"There's one thing puzzles me, Evangeline, but perhaps you can explain it," Peacock Pete observed thoughtfully. "Why does your father seem to favor this man?"

"I cannot explain it."

"Are they old acquaintances?"

"No."

"Yet I am told that he looks upon him as his future son-in-law."

"Oh, no, that will never be!" cried the girl in instant denial, and she felt she was blushing furiously.

"Evangeline, I am almost a stranger to you,

yet I have the presumption to ask if I may enter the lists as a suitor for your hand!"

"Why not, if such a man as this ruffian dares to hope for favor?" answered the girl lowly and shyly.

"I will see your father then, and speak freely to him, although I imagine my suit will not meet with much favor in his eyes."

"Time will tell; but it is I who am to be married, not he."

"You are willing that I should speak to him—it is not disagreeable to you?" he asked, passing his arm caressingly around the slender waist of the girl, for, by her actions, he believed he had discovered she was well disposed to him.

"Yes," she murmured, in almost inaudible tones, and her shapely head sunk down upon his manly shoulder.

Then he drew her closer to him, and, lifting her vail, imprinted upon her ripe red lips, so rich in their dewy sweetness, the first lover's kiss that they had ever received.

But for a moment she nestled against his broad chest, and then as if alarmed by her own weakness, shook hands with him and hurried away.

Her home was only some fifty feet away, and soon she disappeared within it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COYOTE FROM BUENA VISTA.

PEACOCK PETE, after watching his lady-love until the door, closing behind her, hid her almost perfect form from sight, took his way slowly back to the hotel.

"It's a deuced queer thing," he murmured, as he walked along, "that a man like myself, who has been a rolling stone for years, a regular football for fortune, should, in this wild mountain camp, meet with such a perfect angel of a girl."

"Upon my life, she is the sweetest piece of womanhood that my eyes have ever looked upon."

"And the idea of this Redmond Hawk, bully, gambler and desperado as he is, daring to lift his eyes to such a maiden."

"The thought is perfectly ridiculous."

"And Mr. Hawk must be brought to reckoning with me pretty soon, too. I am getting tired of fighting his bullies."

"He must come up to the scratch in person and face the music like a man."

"There has been quite enough of this beating about the bush. He must meet me in single fight, and stop this second-hand business. He must either fight me or leave the town."

"The camp isn't big enough to hold both of us. I will push the matter to a conclusion tomorrow, and Redmond Hawk must either knuckle or git!"

By this time Peacock Pete had reached the hotel, and he went into the saloon, the general lounging-place for the town.

Eighteen or twenty men were in the place, and as he found himself the object of the gaze of all eyes when he entered, he concluded that he had interrupted some conversation regarding himself.

A stranger—a regular giant of a fellow, big-

ger even than the renowned Grizzly Jake, whom Pete had conquered with so little trouble, was leaning by the bar with his back against it.

He was dressed in the usual rough miner fashion, was well-armed, and altogether looked like a man who would prove to be an ugly customer in a row.

The fellow had a lion-like head, long, bushy yellow hair came out in tangled masses from under his weather-beaten hat, and a long yellow beard swept down low on his breast.

His face had a sinister expression, and Peacock Pete, as he took a mental survey of the fellow, came to the conclusion that in the event of a difficulty he would be a tough pilgrim to handle.

The stranger had evidently been addressing the group, for his mouth was open as Peacock Pete entered, and he paused for a moment to take a look at him.

Then, when Peacock Pete closed the door, he went on:

"I tell you wo't it is, pardners, I'm jest a hungry to see this man!" he cried, in a rough, hoarse voice, like the bellowing of a bull.

"I'm a befty man, myself! Oh, pardas, you had jest better believe that!"

"You might look far and see long afore you could run across sich a rip-staving, raving, snorting cuss as I am!"

"You kin believe that, 'cos I'm the critter wo't is a-telling on it to you!"

"My name is sudden death, or else a long fit of sickness!"

"I'm the Howling Coyote from Buena Vista, and I have come all the way to this hyer camp of Five Mile Crossing expressly to see the dog-goned galoot that calls himself Peacock Pete!"

Now our hero understood why all within the room had surveyed him with such curious eyes when he had entered.

The stranger had come into the camp for the express purpose of trying conclusions with him, and had been bragging about it in the saloon.

"He's a dandified chap, too, I heard," the man continued; "rigs himself out in good clothes, puts 'ile on his ha'r, and washes himself once a week."

"Bah!" and the stranger, by this emphatic exclamation, endeavored to show the disgust which filled his breast when he thought of any such reprehensible practices.

"I hain't got no use for no sich galoots!" he cried, loftily.

"And sich a chap as this hyer milk-sop I have heerd held up as a fighter!" and he shook his huge fists in the air.

"Hyers the shop whar he ought to come if he wants mutton!" and then he pounded his chest with his brawny hands.

"Say, some of you, for the love of goodness! jest run out into the town and scare this critter up! Tell him that the finest gen'leman in the country is a-waiting at the shebang, just a-dying for to make his acquaintance."

"Peacock Pete! Oh, my!" and the man gave vent to a snort of contempt. "Won't I make a peacock out of him when I git my two hands onto him? Oh, no; not much! but you kin bet your bottom dollar, you high-howling sinners,

that arter I git through with the critter, thar won't be enuff of him left for to make a good-sized grease-spot out of! That's the kind of man I am, and don't you forget it!"

Peacock Pete comprehended at once how the land lay.

Here was another bully who had been set on to attack him by his unscrupulous foe.

It was not pleasant, and he determined this time to make such an example of the man that it would deter any one else from trying the same game.

"I'm Peacock Pete!" he exclaimed, stepping forward and confronting the stranger, "and if you mean business, I'm ready to accommodate you."

The Coyote from Buena Vista had guessed as much, for the peacock-feathers that the young man wore in his hat, were quite enough to distinguish him from the common run of men.

And this was the reason why he had been so profuse in his taunts.

He was not impressed by Peacock Pete's looks, for he was one of those ignorant fellows, who believe only in brute force, totally ignoring all science, and as Peacock Pete was not six feet tall and built in proportion, he did not think he stood the slightest chance in a contest with a man like himself.

"You don't mean to say that you're Peacock Pete, the galoot that I've hearn so much 'bout?" the Coyote cried in the most contemptuous manner possible.

"That's my name."

"Why, you don't amount to a clump of sage-brush!" the other exclaimed. "Thunder and lightning! 'tain't hardly worth while to smack the face of sich a rat-like chap as you are anyway."

"Oh, you're going to smack my face?"

"Yes, sir-ee, boss fly! that's jest the identical leetle job that I propose to tackle."

"But what are you going to do that for—what have I ever done to you?"

"Nothing at all, my festive rooster. I'm jest a-doing it for fun."

"No; you mean you are doing it for money, and I know the man that put you up to it!" Peacock Pete retorted, sharply.

"Oh, you talk too much with your mouth," cried the other, "and that's one reason why you ought to be smacked, anyway, jest to put a leetle sense into you—sort of teach you to hold your tongue when the boss is around."

"Your boss is Redmond Hawk."

"You're a liar!" replied the big fellow, taking a step toward Pete.

"You have been hired to pick a quarrel with me; but I give you fair warning that I am getting tired of this sort of thing, and if you force me into a fight I'll kill you as sure as you're born!"

"Hey! you're crowing pretty loud for sich a bantam! I reckon I'll have to wade in and take some of the nonsense out of you."

"Come out into the center of the saloon then, where there'll be room for the circus!"

"You don't say that you really mean to toe the mark, and face the music?" the Coyote asked.

"Try me and see," Peacock Pete replied.

The bystanders drew back out of the way, so as to afford a clear field for the encounter.

They had an idea that inside a minute the stranger would be about as amazed a man as the camp of Five Mile Crossing had ever seen.

Most of those in the room had been witnesses of Peacock Pete's prowess on the occasion when he had so easily polished off his opponents.

They remembered how, with his iron-like fists, he had hammered Grizzly Jake until the nearest and dearest friend of the bully would never have been able to recognize him.

And, although this fellow seemed to be a better man than Jake, yet it was the general opinion that he would not succeed in making a much better show than that worthy.

"Now, then, are you ready for to be smashed right up into pancakes?" the Coyote queried, as he assumed a fighting position.

"Oh, yes, I'm all ready; but if you don't eat anything until that operation is performed you'll be mighty apt to die of starvation," Peacock Pete replied.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SINGULAR PROPOSITION.

As the two faced each other it really seemed as if it was a most unequal contest, for the rough-and-ready personage, who termed himself the Coyote from Buena Vista, appeared to be nearly twice as big as Peacock Pete.

But so great was the confidence of the bystanders in the young champion's ability to cope with the stranger, thanks to the essay manner in which he had overcome Grizzly Jake that there was hardly a man in the crowd who would not have been willing to bet odds upon Peacock Pete.

"Look out for yourself now, for the' airthquake is a-coming," the big fellow exclaimed, and then he rushed upon his antagonist.

There wasn't any dodging this time on the part of Peacock Pete as there had been when he encountered Grizzly Jake.

But he stood like a rock, and as the Coyote attempted to close in upon him he met the giant with a blow between the eyes that made him see more stars than he had ever distinguished in the heavens, going down with a crash that shook the whole building.

The Coyote from Buena Vista had been "knocked out" in the first round.

It was a fact; the terrible blows had stunned the man so that it was fully five minutes before he recovered sufficiently to know what was going on around him.

None of the bystanders hastened to his assistance for there wasn't a man in the room who wasn't glad to see the bully receive so terrible a lesson.

When he recovered from the effects of the shock he sat up and looked around him, a look of utter amazement upon his face.

And as he glanced at the man who had handled him so roughly, the expression in his eyes seemed to say:

"Is this possible or is it all a dream?"

Peacock Pete's blood was up though and he was anxious to bring the matter to a conclusion.

"Come, 'rise up, William Reilly' and toe the

scratch!" he exclaimed. "You set out to smash me into pancakes, you know, and you can't do it sitting down there on the floor."

"Wal, I reckon you're a bruiser, you air!" the fellow growled, rising slowly to his feet.

"Oh I can do a little hammering once in a while, particularly when I can run across such a first-class chopping-block as you are to operate upon," Peacock Pete rejoined.

"Cuss me! if you ain't the hardest biter of any man I ever struck," the Coyote from Buena Vista observed, examining the young man in the most careful manner as if seeking to discover from whence he derived his wonderful power.

"Oh, I can't hit at all to speak of; the fact is you're such a soft, pasty, putty-like man that almost anybody could lay you out without any trouble," Peacock Pete replied, to the great delight of the crowd who "haw-hawed!" outright at the idea.

"But come, we're wasting time," the young man continued. "You're to smash me into pancakes, you know, and as you was mighty anxious to wade in a few minutes ago, suppose you gird up your loins and try it on again."

"Not if the court knows herself!" cried the Coyote immediately, "and she reckons she do. No, sir, you can't play that racket a second time on me."

"I'm the keenest man that ever struck this town and don't you forget it."

"I know when I've got enuff and that's the kind of a keno wheel I am!"

"What?" cried Peacock Pete in astonishment, "are you going to crawfish—going to take water at this early stage of the game? Why, the fun hasn't begun yet."

"Wal, you may call it fun to be hammered into a jelly but I'm blessed if I do!" the other growled.

"Why, you big booby!" Peacock Pete exclaimed in contempt. "You came into this camp for the express purpose of laying me out and now you back out of the job, right at the beginning."

"Nary back out, no sir-ee; that ain't the kind of a mud-scow that I am," the Coyote replied, promptly. "I am going to down you—I'll lay you out afore I get through with you, but not with fists. No, pard, I pass on fists!"

"Aha, you've got enough at that game!" Peacock exclaimed in contempt.

"You bet. You don't dar' to fight me with revolvers!"

"Oh, don't I? Why you overgrown lunk-head I can wipe you out any way you take me!"

"Mebbe you kin and mebbe you can't!" the giant retorted. "I heered that you was a dead-shot and I reckon you don't dar' to give a chance to git squar' with you!"

"I'll give you any fair chance."

"Will you fight a duel with revolvers?"

"I will."

"Two revolvers to each man?"

"Agreed."

"Distance, twenty paces apart."

"All right."

"We to stand with our backs to each other and fire over the tops of our heads. A judge to

be app'nted with liberty to shoot down the cuss w'ot attempts to turn 'round."

A hum of astonishment went through the room at this novel proposal.

Peacock Pete understood the game instantly. His adversary had probably practiced this novel style of shooting, and felt satisfied that he could hit his man.

The man who had set the stranger on to attack him, knew that he was an expert revolver-shot, and so had devised the odd conditions of this duel on purpose to neutralize his skill.

"It suits me first-rate, pardner; you have hit me where I live, every time," Peacock Pete said.

"And now, who will you have as judge?"

"Let the crowd decide that!" cried one of the miners, determined that the stranger should not gain any unfair advantage.

"Wal, I s'pose that will be fair," the Coyote observed slowly, although from the expression upon his face, it was plain that he would have preferred some other arrangement, but a glance at the faces of the bystanders had revealed to him that they would not be apt to stand any nonsense, and that if he proposed Redmond Hawk, as he had originally intended, there would be instant objection made.

"All I want is a fair shake," he continued. "I'm the squarest kind of a man, and all I want is a squar' deal."

"That's jest what you will get in this camp!" exclaimed the miner who had before spoken.

"We're all squar' men hyer, and we don't propose to take nary bit of advantage of anybody, nor allow anybody to come any rigs on us if we know it. I nominate Tom Coffin, hyer, for judge, and you kin jest bet your bottom dollar that he is the man w'ot will see that everybody gets a squar' show, and no mistake," and as he finished, he hit a veteran, gray-headed miner who stood by his side a hearty slap on the shoulder.

Tom Coffin was one of the original prospectors who had located the camp, and his nomination was received with decided signs of approval by the rest.

"Yes, yes, Tom Coffin!" cried a half a dozen in a breath.

"Coffin is a first-class name for the judge in such an affair as this," Peacock Pete observed, "and as far as I am concerned, Mr. Coffin will answer as well as any man that you could pick up in the wide world."

"Well, how does it suit your royal highness?" asked the spokesman of the Buena Vista Coyote, who was looking askance at Coffin, as if undecided in regard to him.

"Oh, I reckon he'll do," the giant replied. "Anybody will do, I reckon, so long as I git a squar' deal; that's w'ot I'm arter."

"Me, too, all the time," Peacock Pete remarked. "I can lay you out in a square fight, and so I ain't anxious for any funny business."

"So look out for yourself now, for I give you fair warning."

The Coyote grunted a defiance, and then the whole party adjourned to the street.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STREET FIGHT.

By this time the storm-cloud which had

threatened to burst upon the town had passed away, and the moon was shining brightly, so the duelists had plenty of light for their contest.

The sudden irruption from the saloon of such a crowd attracted immediate attention, and everybody within eyesight hurried to the spot, anxious to see what was going on.

It did not take many minutes for a crowd of thirty or forty people to assemble.

The contestants examined their revolvers, and Tom Coffin, as judge, rehearsed the terms of the fight, so that there should not be any misunderstanding.

"Now, gen'lemen," he said, "I reckon that both on you are anxious for a squar' fight—a fair field, no favor, and may the best man win."

"That's me, every time!" Peacock Pete remarked.

"I reckon that's all I want, though mebbe I won't git it, seeing as how that I'm a stranger in this burgh," the Buena Vista Coyote observed with a doubtful glance at the faces of the bystanders.

"Stranger, you're going to git the squarest kind of a deal!" Tom Coffin cried, impressively, "and I don't want you to forget it either."

"This is a squar' camp—squar' as a die every time, and that's the sort of reputation we travel on."

"No man ever struck the camp of Five Mile Crossing yit and went out of it complaining that he didn't git a fair show for his money."

"Wal, a fair show is all I axes," the giant replied doggedly. "But I'm a stranger hyer, while this galoot—"

"Is a stranger, too!" Tom Coffin hastened to exclaim. "He hain't been hyer but a mighty few days, but that hain't really got anything to do with it."

"The pilgrim sharp w'ot hasn't got a friend to back him up stands jest as good a chance for a fair show in this hyer town as the oldest citizen in the place."

"This town ought to be called Fair Play Camp, fer we're jest as squar' as squar' kin be in sich things."

"Now you're to stand twenty paces apart—John Michaels, you've got a good pair of long legs, suppose you paces off the distance."

"All right, I'm agreeable; anything to oblige," responded the miner.

Then, starting from a line which he made with the heel of one of his boots in the dirt in the middle of the street, John Michaels paced off the distance, and at the other end made a similar mark.

"Thar you are, right as ninepence!" Tom Coffin exclaimed. "One man stand on one line, and the other man on t'other."

"Each man to have two revolvers, one held in each hand."

"You are to stand with your backs to each other and fire over the top of your heads, and no other way."

"After one revolver is empty you are at liberty to use the other."

"I'll act as umpire, with my cocked pistol, and I give you fair warning that I'm the biggest old dead-shot that you kin scare up in a thousand

miles, and the first man that attempts to break the terms of the agreement, or to take any unfair advantage I'll plug quicker'n a wink."

"That's it! that's the talk!" the bystanders remarked.

And it is worthy of note that, although the sympathy of the crowd was most entirely with Peacock Pete, and they firmly believed that in this novel contest he would be successful in whipping his antagonist, there wasn't a man of them who would not rather have seen Peacock Pete defeated than to win by unfair means.

"S'pose we use up all our shots and neither one on us goes under?" the Coyote asked.

"Oh, you're both of you too good men for that to happen, I reckon," Tom Coffin replied.

"But s'pose it does?" the big fellow persisted.

"Well, wait until it does, and then it will be easy to arrange something else; that's fair and square for both on you, I reckon."

As there was no gainsaying the truth of this, the Coyote held his peace.

"Now, gen'lemen, if you will have the kindness to toe the scratch, I'll give the signal to begin the fun," Tom Coffin remarked, drawing one of the heavy six-shooters buckled to his waist, and deliberately cocking it.

The duelists took their positions.

"Put your heels onto the mark, if you please," said the judge.

The two obeyed.

"Now, out with your we'pons, and git ready!"

Each man drew his revolver and cocked it.

"Hands over your heads!" sung out Coffin.

Up went their hands.

"Are you all ready for the fandango?"

"Ready!" both answered in a breath.

"Now I'll count one, two, three, and after three you kin fire. You understand that all right?"

"Yes," responded the two in chorus.

"Keep your eyes peeled now! One, two, three! Waltz in, you cripples!" yelled the judge.

As Peacock Pete had surmised, the big fellow had practiced at this difficult backward shooting.

It was Redmond Hawk who had devised the scheme.

He knew that no one but an extraordinary shot would stand any chance at all against Peacock Pete's wonderful skill at a regular shooting-match, and so he had puzzled out this odd backward shot, thinking by the novelty of the thing to take Peacock Pete at a disadvantage.

The Buena Vista Coyote was a good shot, but hardly a match for such a master-hand at target-practice as Peacock Pete.

He was an old acquaintance of Hawk's and the arch-plotter had sent for him and after he had arrived, for three days he had kept himself secluded, practicing diligently at the backward shot, and when he had got the thing "down fine" as he expressed it, he had set out to try the game upon the man whom Hawk hated so bitterly.

But in this matter the conspirators had reckoned "without the host," for the backward shot was an old trick with Peacock Pete.

He had experimented at it in all sorts of ways, first holding a mirror in the left hand and shooting over his shoulder with his right, taking aim at the target by the aid of the reflection in the mirror, and then had tried it without the glass, the trick being to get the target in a direct line with some object in front of the marksman.

This was the dodge that the Coyote intended to work; but accident on this occasion favored Peacock Pete most decidedly, for right in front of him was a tree which seemed to guide his aim, while the other had nothing better than the end of a house, which was some distance off.

And then, too, Peacock Pete had nerves of iron and was just as cool when shooting at a human target, with his own life put up as a forfeit for a miscalculation, as when practicing at a mark.

The Coyote, on the contrary, was nervous, and then too the hammering which he had received was not calculated to steady his nerves.

Consequently he hesitated in aiming while Peacock Pete fired almost immediately after the word was given.

And with so true an aim that the report of the pistol was answered by a howl of pain coming from the lips of the Buena Vista Coyote.

He staggered for a moment and then went down upon his face, the revolver dropping from his nerveless hand.

Peacock Pete's unerring aim sent a ball through his right shoulder, making a wound which although not mortal was sufficient to keep the bully from being able to do damage to any one for many a long day.

"I reckon the picnic is over," the judge remarked; but hardly had the words left his lips, and just as Peacock Pete turned to look at his fallen foe, when there was a sharp pistol-crack, and the champion went down.

The pistol-shot came from a horseman who was partially concealed behind a house about a hundred feet away.

And the moment the shot was fired, and he saw that it had taken effect, he put spurs to his horse and fled.

He would have escaped, too, had there not been a hunter in the crowd with a repeating rifle, who had just come in from a hunt.

And it was not a difficult job for this expert rifle-shot to draw a "bead" on the fleeing man, and put a ball right through him.

The rider threw up his hands and fell from his horse, stone dead, upon the instant.

The well-aimed ball had cleft the heart of the assassin in twain.

And when they came to examine him they discovered that it was Redmond Hawk.

He had laid in ambush, determined to compass the death of his foe by foul means, if his hired bully failed.

Justice had quickly overtaken him, though, and called him to a stern account.

And Peacock Pete, too, escaped with but a slight wound, for the ball had been discharged at such a distance that it had lost its power to do mortal harm when it reached him.

Reader, our story is told; for, with the death of Hawk, Peacock Pete's persecution came to an end.

And now that Hawk was gone, the storekeeper, old Hopkins, made no objection to the young man when he came as a suitor for his daughter.

Hawk held a rod over him, having discovered that the old man had been engaged in crooked transactions in the East, and Hopkins feared exposure.

And so, basking in the sunshine of prosperity, we leave our hero, but at some future time we may again follow the fortunes of the Lively Lad from Leadville, Peacock Pete.

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